

DC RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEM

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



COLLEGE of ARTS & SCIENCES

HEALTHY SCHOOLS,
HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Cultivating an equitable food system in DC.

American University's Department of Health Studies
Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities Lab

Rabia Tanweer, MA
Kaitlyn Kelley, MS, CHES®
Grace Stevens, MA, CHES®
Robin McClave, MS, CHES®
Anastasia Snelling, Ph.D, RD

November 2025



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	ii
Acronyms and Abbreviations	iii
Introduction	1
Our Approach.....	2
2025 Grantees	3
Impact on Production	4
Impact on Distribution	7
Impact on Consumption.....	9
Impact on Cohesion	10
Advisory Boards	11
A Roadmap for the Year Ahead	12
Acknowledgements	13

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Resilient Food System program, previously known as the Equitable Food System program, has successfully completed its second year of operation in FY25. This initiative, implemented by American University's Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities Lab and funded by Novo Nordisk Inc., seeks to transform the food system in Washington, DC, by enhancing local food supply chains and improving access to nutritious food, particularly for residents of Wards 7 and 8, who experience high inequity in access.

During FY25, the program allocated funding to seven organizations operating within the three pillars of the food system: production, distribution, and consumption. Additionally, it provided direct support to farmers through essential grants aimed at acquiring equipment necessary for increasing both food production and distribution. As a result, the program directly reached over 10,000 more people than in its inaugural year, FY24. Beyond numbers, the program has significantly impacted the daily lives of many participants. Farmers now possess greater knowledge and resources, enabling them to cultivate and sell larger quantities of food. This increase in production has led to higher revenues and facilitates a greater flow of healthy, locally-sourced food into the city.

Our funding has also empowered distributors to bring in more locally-sourced, nutritious food. These distributors serve as vital links between the region's farmers and key organizations and institutions that provide food to the city. As a result, produce distribution has increased in DC and within Wards 7 and 8. Our funding has enabled over 16,000 individuals to receive more than 448,000 servings of food. Surveys indicate that a majority of participants plan to increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables as a result of our produce distribution and nutrition education initiatives. These behavioral changes are essential for improving health outcomes for many residents.

Lastly, we successfully convened key organizations and institutions focused on transforming DC's food system for two significant events this year. These gatherings facilitated crucial discussions on collaboration and enhancing our collective impact. In FY26, we aim to bolster our support of the DC food system by concentrating more efforts on production and distribution, as well as building cohesive and aligned partnerships among various stakeholders in this field to measurably impact local food system resilience.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIE	Agriculture Infrastructure and Equipment
BFTP	Future Harvest’s Beginner Farmer Training Program
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, People of Color
CBH	Create Better Health SNAP-Ed Curriculum
DC	District of Columbia
DCCK	DC Central Kitchen
DMV	DC, Maryland, and Virginia
FY	Fiscal Year
HSHC	Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities
LCHC	Leadership Council for Healthy Communities
Metro AME Church	Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church
PUFH	FRESHFARM’s Pop-Up Food Hub
The Lab	The Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities Lab at AU
RFS	Resilient Food System
SAMS	Sarah Allen Missionary Society
TA	Technical Assistance



INTRODUCTION

The Focus of Our Work

American University's Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities Lab (HSHC) focuses on proven strategies of facilitating change, from the individual level to system-wide policies, that increase access to healthy foods and physical activity, support healthy behaviors, and reduce factors that contribute to chronic disease. To do this, local realities and community context must be at the heart of community-led action that will achieve the strongest and most sustainable transformative impact. The Lab has over 15 years of demonstrated expertise collaborating with stakeholders and funders to implement and evaluate community-based programs and strategies that improve health.

In September 2023, HSHC received a three-year \$2.8 million grant from Novo Nordisk Inc. to support transforming the DC food system by improving local food supply chains and healthy food options, particularly for residents in Wards 7 and 8, who lack sufficient and reliable access to healthy and nutritious foods (DC Hunger Solutions 2025).

The Lab's Resilient Food System (RFS) program engages all phases in the interconnected web of the food system. To achieve an equitable food system that works for all in DC, it also ensures all stages of the food system collaborate and expand.

OUR APPROACH

To achieve this goal of a resilient DC food system that is working for all, HSHC employs a four-pronged approach.

By targeting three key pillars of the food system: **production, distribution, and consumption**, RFS ensures increased access and improved availability of healthy and nutritious foods in Wards 7 and 8 of the city, while simultaneously increasing individuals' knowledge around nutrition and improving their health.

Lastly, **the program unites these three, often siloed pillars of the food system through its coalition alignment work, which builds system collaboration and trusted partnerships across all actors of the food system**, from the farmer to the communities we serve to government and private industry actors.

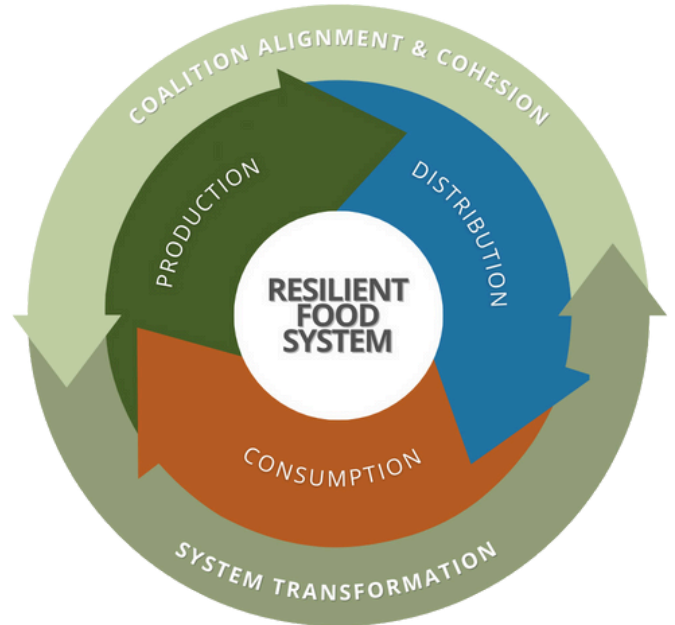
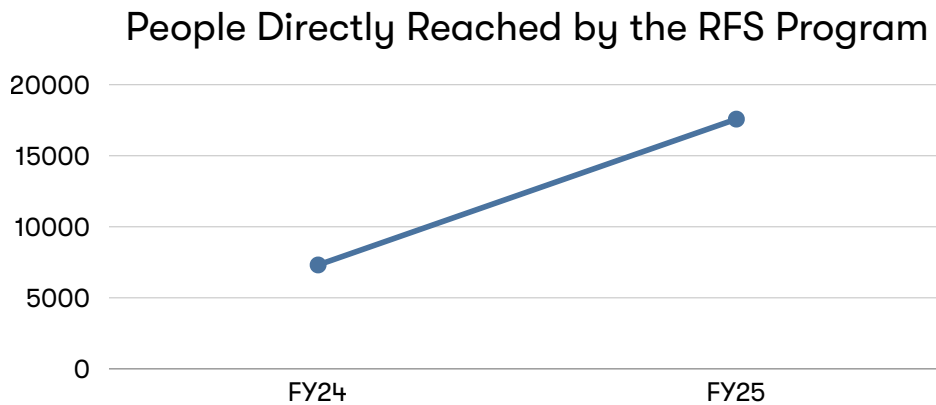


Figure 1: HSHC Resilient Food System Model



Our first year of programming targeted the three pillars of the food system, directly reaching a total of 7,314 people and their households. You can read more about our work and results [here](#). In FY25, we directly reached a total of 17,580 people via our grantees (not including recipients of produce at FRESHFARM markets).

2025 GRANTEES



Future Harvest's Beginner Farmer Training Program (BFTP) provided educational support and technical assistance to enhance nutrition access in the DC Metro region, especially in Wards 7 & 8, by increasing the number of trained farmers growing food locally.

Production



Rodale Institute provided technical assistance to support six individual farmers in adopting regenerative organic and regenerative agriculture principles and practices.

Agriculture Infrastructure and Equipment Grants

The HSHC Lab supported real-time implementation of expanded farming capacity through the activation of our Agriculture Infrastructure and Equipment (AIE) grants.



FRESHFARM expanded access to healthy, local food for community-based partners serving food-insecure populations in Washington, DC, including in Wards 7 & 8, through its Pop-Up Food Hub (PUFH) and partnerships with local black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) farmers to strengthen their role in the food system.



DC Central Kitchen (DCCK) expanded its efforts to purchase, process, and distribute locally grown foods to food-insecure residents in Washington, DC through corner stores and community partners.



Food for All's graduate research intern supported the planning and implementation of a pilot food is medicine program, and helped draft a comprehensive nutrition assistance framework for homebound individuals.



The Metro AME Church expanded the number of food bank participants the Sarah Allen Missionary Society (SAMS) Food Bank can serve and enhanced access to additional fresh produce for those participants.



The Leadership Council for Healthy Communities (LCHC) supported DC residents living in a local multi-unit affordable housing complex by providing nutrition education, raising awareness of available food access resources, and distributing food vouchers for residents to purchase healthy foods at nearby farmers markets.

Distribution

Consumption

IMPACT ON PRODUCTION

This year, our program engaged a total of 77 DMV farmers across our AIE grants, Rodale’s technical assistance (TA), FRESHFARM’s PUFH farmers, and Future Harvest’s BFTP. These efforts focused on building farmer capacity and increasing revenue.

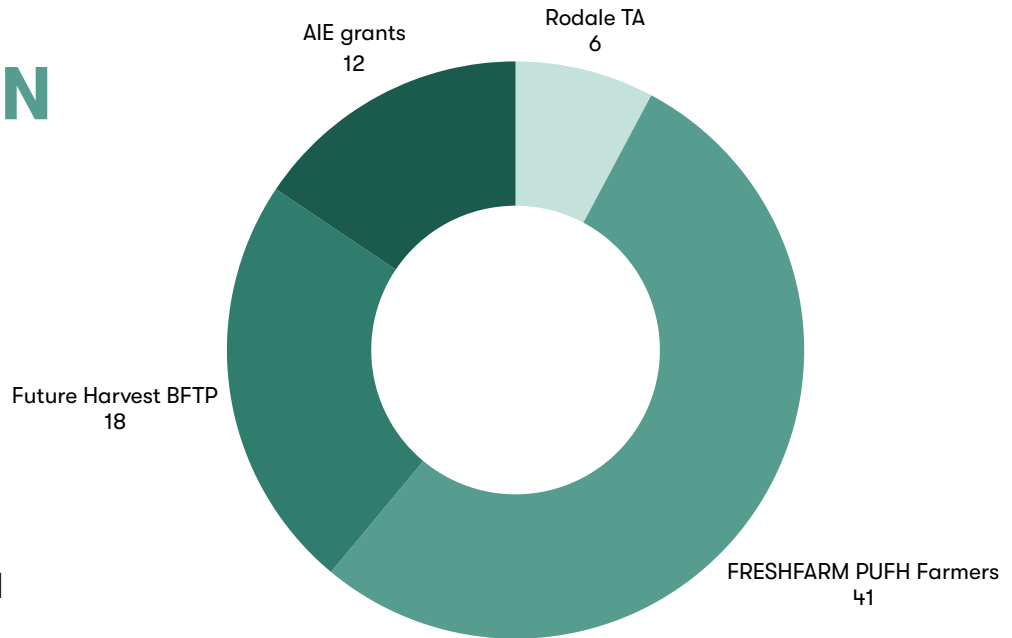


Figure 2: Local Farmers Engaged by Activity



Farmer Gale Livingstone at the Watkins School location on Capitol Hill

The 2025 AIE grants provided 12 farmers with needed equipment that increases their efficiency and production yield. That translates to greater capacity to serve Wards 7 and 8.

For example, for the past five years, AIE grant recipient Deep Roots Farm has performed potato planting and harvesting by hand. The 2025 AIE Grant allowed the farm to purchase a potato harvester and planter. **As a result, Deep Roots Farm can now do two cycles of potato planning and harvesting in one season on a larger area of land, more than doubling their harvest.**

“Planting with an automatic seeder and harvester will save the crew countless hours of bending over to plant and harvest. This will increase moral and worker longevity.”

- Deep Roots Farm

IMPACT ON PRODUCTION

With funding from the RFS program, Future Harvest’s BFTP program trained 18 beginner farmers working in the DC area. This cohort stewards over 125 acres of farmland across the DMV.

The BFTP consists of an annual conference, a 10-week online classroom series on topics related to sustainable farming, and field days. This experience provided this cohort of new farmers with not only hands-on training, but integrated networking opportunities.

The educational support and technical assistance aims to increase the number of trained farmers growing nutritious food locally, thereby enhancing nutrition access in the DC metro region. **Pre- and post-surveys indicate participants have increased knowledge across diverse farming topics, including soil health, succession planting, and post-harvest handling.**

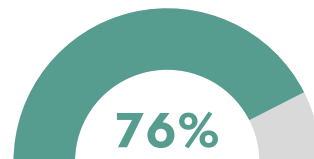
The BFTP program prioritizes engaging traditionally marginalized farmers. Of the 18 farmers engaged, 14 identified as female, one as nonbinary, and one as transgender.



Participants at Future Harvest’s BFTP Field Walk at Sassafras Farm in Dunkirk, MD



Participants at Future Harvest’s Irrigation Workshop at Potomac Veggie Farm in Vienna, VA



of 13 BFTP participants surveyed **reported understanding planting dates in the DC region for different crops and the how to develop a crop plan**, compared to just 25% of 16 participants surveyed before beginning the program.

SPOTLIGHT STORY



Asawana Farms

Farmer Isaac, founder of Asawana Farms, has been engaged in several RFS initiatives with farmers. He is a past participant of Future Harvest's BFTP program (his cohort was not funded under RFS), a recipient of an AIE grant, and has received technical assistance from Rodale.

Asawana Farms requested a fertigation system and drip irrigation kits to use water more efficiently, avoiding the water loss that typically occurs when using traditional sprinkler irrigation systems.

As a result of the AIE grant, Asawana Farms was able to purchase the equipment needed to preserve water and increase agricultural yield.

"Obtaining this grant and buying the equipment will allow us to focus on what we do best: to share our knowledge with the community."

- Asawana Farms

Through Rodale's tailored technical assistance (via site visits and ongoing remote conversations), Farmer Isaac is gaining valuable farmer-to-farmer experience on topics related to increasing revenue through wholesale outlets and on farm events. This story is one many that showcases the impact the RFS program has had on individual farms and farmers.



IMPACT ON DISTRIBUTION



Members of the FRESHFARM team at the Simon Elementary Farm Stand in Ward 8.



498 food deliveries to community-based partners in Wards 7 and 8.

RFS funding recipients FRESHFARM and DCCK leveraged their funding to expand their efforts to serve food-insecure residents in Wards 7 and 8.

Through its PUFH and partnerships with BIPOC farmers, FRESHFARM was able to serve residents directly while also elevating the visibility of underrepresented producers in the food system with RFS funding.

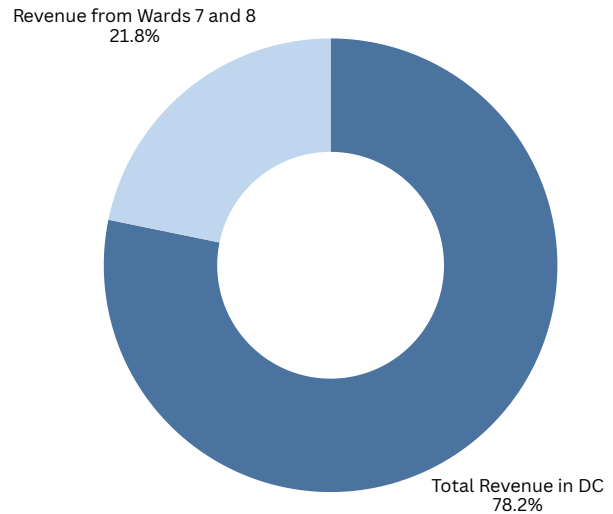


Figure 3: FRESHFARM Revenue in DC and Wards 7 & 8

The funding also allowed FRESHFARM to strengthen its engagement in Wards 7 and 8. In FY25, FRESHFARM distributed produce to 23 institutions in these wards, more than doubling the number of partners compared to FY24. This surge in distributions resulted in a notable increase in revenue. Between FY24 and FY25, total revenue in these wards grew by 26%. **That translates to increased revenue for small- and mid-sized local farmers in the Mid-Atlantic region, particularly black and brown farmers, and connections between them and new wholesale partners that can help grow their business. Meanwhile, community-based organizations are provided fresh, locally grown produce at wholesale prices that feed their community.**

IMPACT ON DISTRIBUTION

DCKC utilized its funding from RFS to enhance its procurement of healthy, locally sourced food for their Healthy Corner stores and community institutions such as schools. Consequently, DCKC reported that in August 2025, there was an increase of 8% in local produce sourced and sold to community partners and a 5% rise in local produce sourced and sold at their Healthy Corner stores compared to August 2024.

This means more reliable and accessible produce and other healthy items for consumers, particularly food insecure individuals. In addition, farmers benefit from new, reliable revenue streams.



The renovated Stanton Supermarket Healthy Corners store in Ward 8 now includes a full produce department.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

The
People's
Market

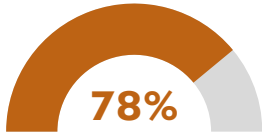
The People's Market

Through a FY24 grant from RFS, The People's Market acquired a refrigerated van that significantly expanded the Market's ability to transport larger volumes of food, enabling them to make more frequent and higher quantity deliveries. As of August 2025, there's already been a 35% growth in delivery sales. The van has also enabled the People's Market to diversify its revenue streams. As a result, they have seen a 79% increase in revenue through their sales to restaurants, non-profits, and other businesses. **This impact has had a cascade effect on the farmers that the People's Market works with - the use of the refrigerated van has enabled farmers to sell more, increasing their revenues as well.**



IMPACT ON CONSUMPTION

RFS funded two community-based organizations that aimed to improve health outcomes for communities in Wards 7 and 8: LCHC and the Metro AME Church. Both organizations improved their respective community's food access through their food distribution efforts.



of 106 respondents reported that the AME distributions allows them to eat more fruits and vegetables as compared to without.



16,591 people reached

with food provided by the Metro AME Church, LCHC, and DCCK.



448,795 servings provided

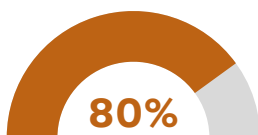
by the Metro AME Church, LCHC, and DCCK.



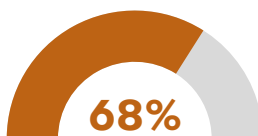
LCHC CBH nutrition education classes were also paired with cooking demonstrations and produce distributions.

LCHC led two 8-week nutrition education series utilizing the SNAP-Ed curriculum Create Better Health (CBH). Participants from both series reported that, as a result of the the knowledge they had gained, they intended to make healthier lifestyle changes.

Key behavior changes related to dietary habits and knowledge have the potential to significantly alter and improve participants' quality of life.



of 25 respondents reported that they intend to use nutrition fact labels to make food choices.



of 25 respondents reported that they intend to eat more fruits and vegetables daily.

“The classes have been a wealth of information. They taught me how to be a better shopper and cook—especially how to read food labels and try new, healthy recipes.”

- CBH participant

IMPACT ON COHESION

The Resilient Food System Summit

October 9, 2024

The Summit hosted 89 attendees with representation from more than 50 organizations, including community-based and healthcare organizations, government, and businesses. The Summit sought to collaboratively define a resilient food system, and highlight strengths, challenges, and opportunities for progress.

As a result, these leaders representing all pillars of the food system were provided a venue for collaboration and idea-sharing to build a shared vision and avenues for future collaboration.



[Click here to watch some RFS Summit Highlights](#)



[Click here to read the Nutrition Education Forum Report](#)

Nutrition Education Forum

March 25, 2025

The Nutrition Education Forum hosted 47 attendees from 24 diverse organizations to showcase their nutrition education programs and receive feedback from American University faculty on best practices for implementing evidence-based programs. **This event provided a space for these organizations to not only learn from experts at AU, but from their peer organizations.**

THANK YOU TO OUR BOARDS

The AU HSHC team sincerely appreciates the contributions of our two boards.

Our Board of Advisors:

Enid Borden
Chris Bradshaw
Caroline Howe
LaMonika Jones
Alison Powers
Joelle Robinson
Lindsay Smith
Beverley Wheeler

Our Community Advisory Board:

Mary Blackford
Mary Douglas-Brown
Ashley Drakeford
Ekua Hudson
Ajowa Ifateyo
Dylan Owens
Falani Spivey
Rhonda Watson

The vision and leadership of our advisory boards have guided the strategy and implementation of key activities in FY25 and planning for FY26. They provide consistent and invaluable insight that ensures the RFS program keeps key values at the forefront of our approach.

This includes ensuring our program has an integrated approach through the coordination of strategies across all sectors of the food system and innovatively reimagining our food system by identifying organizations and projects that can bridge health and food needs. In addition, they ensure equity and access are always at the forefront of our activities by highlighting disparities in food access that are often related to inequities in housing and education.

Their guidance ensures the RFS is at the forefront of addressing key challenges and emerging opportunities within the DC region.



A ROADMAP FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Focusing on where we can make the most impact

In FY25, it became clear that the program would need to prioritize its focus on the work within the production and distribution sectors, as well as our work building bridges of collaboration across the food system in the coming year. Our team found that while many allies were working in the ‘consumption’ space, more investment in solving long-term challenges in these other areas is needed. In doing so, we believe we can make a more lasting impact on food access, nutrition, and health.

In FY26, we plan to focus on shortening supply chains. In connecting local farmers to nearby distribution and access points, we can support a robust local economy, increase food security, and bolster the health of our community and the climate. To do this, we plan to work with organizations and public institutions to commit to local sourcing minimums - leveraging our ability to make tangible, real-time progress in DC.

Harnessing the value of shared measurement and data

In FY25, our team conducted extensive research on the food system policies of cities and municipalities across the country to understand their key components - in particular the areas in which cities aim to progress and what key indicators they aim to track in order to measure that progress. Through this review and conversations with our boards, we built a draft food system data dashboard for DC. A comprehensive tool like this does not currently exist in DC. Therefore, it is difficult to understand the impact programs like RFS and many others have.

In FY26, we aim to finalize and share this dashboard. It is our hope that the dashboard will not only be utilized by key stakeholders in DC, but that these stakeholders will contribute to its finalization and updating. In doing so, the dashboard will serve as a living resource, measuring our combined progress in transforming our food system.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The task of reconnecting a fractured food system is highly complex. In Fiscal Year 2026, we will continue to establish linkages that promote a more coordinated and resilient food chain, encompassing all stages from production to consumption within the Washington, DC region.

This is a pivotal moment for our food systems initiatives, and we extend our gratitude to our funder, Novo Nordisk Inc., as well as to our advisors, community partners, staff, and all contributors to these efforts. We would like to express special appreciation to many of our colleagues at American University for their invaluable support and consultation.

We are fortunate to have received extensive media coverage of our work. To learn more about our activities over the past year, please refer to the hyperlinked pages below.

[East of the River News, November 2024](#)

[Hill Rag, August 2025](#)

[WUSA9, August 2025](#)

[NBC Washington, August 2025](#)

[Hill Rag, September 2025](#)

[Edible, November 2025](#)



Contact Us :



Phone
(202) 885-3745



Email Address
healthstudies@american.edu



Website
www.american.edu/cas/healthyschools/