Taproot Plus Panel: Social Issue Spotlight Hunger & Food Insecurity

April 11, 2023 08:47:26 • 1:06:31

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And I want to officially welcome everybody to this Taproot Foundation, social issue spotlight panel, as you may have already gathered from the discussion taking place, and we've even got folks out in the garden actively working on planting food that is going to go in and fill the bellies of community members. Really, really beautiful. We are talking today about hunger and food insecurity, challenges impacting communities across the United States. We have some really incredible speakers lined up today. And so it should be a great conversation. We're excited to have each of you here for this lunch and learn or it might be a breakfast and learn for people from the West Coast.

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I'm gonna go ahead and ask folks to just keep themselves muted during this kickoff portion. But we are going to have plenty of time and space for attendees and participants to be actively engaged in the conversation. So coming off of mute raising your hand to ask questions directly of our expert speakers. Or if you feel more comfortable using the chat or the q&a box to ask those questions instead.

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So today is really meant to be an equal mix of education, and activation of talent and volunteerism. Hunger is on the rise globally, due to factors stemming from

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a huge range of issues, climate change, the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic global conflict, communities across the United States have really been hit hard, with 34 million Americans now identified as future food insecure, with 9 million of those being children. And so it's really critical in this moment that we understand the barriers to food access, that are impacting communities, and how each of us have the power to take action to support the nonprofits. We're working on the ground. We're working on the front lines, to provide this critical service to our community members. And so as I mentioned, this is meant to be an open conversation. So please, if you're comfortable, be on camera.

We're going to invite folks later on to unmute themselves, ask questions, engage directly with our expert speakers. But we're here to learn and discuss with our panelists about the communities that they're serving, how they're serving them and the solutions that they're employing to address hunger and food insecurity. And we'll definitely follow up with any resource that our panelists mentioned, Richard, you already shouted out something that you're doing this weekend, we will be more than happy to include the link to that the link to your websites, the link to any volunteer opportunities in our follow up email from this event. So we're going to my colleague, Megan Gillette is on the line. She's going to be a note taker for us. And she's also here to provide technical service or support if anyone needs it throughout the call. So definitely stay tuned later this afternoon or at the very latest tomorrow morning. For that follow up email.

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All right, one additional logistics note before I dive into introducing our panelists, we are recording this panel, we really don't want to miss out on any of the great insights that our panelists share in that recording will be shared as soon as we're able to, as I mentioned this afternoon, or tomorrow morning. No, every other week. Oh, and I'm going to Yep, it looks like we're muted on that ends. Again, we'll we'll let folks know when to unmute themselves. We'll make use of the Zoom raise hand function just because we do have a lot of folks on the line at this point. And so we'll try and stay organized while also giving everyone a chance to speak up, ask questions and join conversation with our expert panelists. So with those logistics out of the way, I'm going to get things rolling with some introductions. First off, my name is Kimberly Swartz. My pronouns are she her, and I'm located in Charlotte, North Carolina. I'm taproots, director of community engagement, and I'm going to be the moderator during today's panel. So we did have a few of folks who registered for this event, who shared questions about taproot and what our nonprofit does. So just really quickly.

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In its most basic sense, Taproot Foundation exists to connect nonprofits with the resources they need to

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reach more people with their mission. And so we're here is the connectors between perfect

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nationals in the marketing and finance and strategy worlds who have a desire to give back who want to get involved with great causes. And tapper can help direct them and mobilize them in support of nonprofits working in the hunger and food insecurity, space, and many other spaces as well. So if you do have any questions about getting involved in taproot programs, we probably won't have time during this panel to focus on it. That said, feel free to put them in the chat, raise your hand, Megan, and I can be in touch with you one on one following this event. But we want this panel to be all about our expert speakers that we have with us today from the taproot nonprofit community. So I'm delighted to kick off those introductions, starting with Erica Hall, who is the chair of the board for the Florida Food Policy Council, a volunteer led nonprofit that works to address gaps in effect policy within the food system, through integrity and collaboration for the benefit of all Floridians and the environment.

So they are a grassroots nonprofit organization. And they're formed to act as a resource for residents and elected officials within the state of Florida on the topic of food policy. So they're all about creating opportunities to collaborate, celebrate and advance equitable food policies to improve quality of life. And I think I mentioned this before, so some of you might have heard, but I am I grew up in Florida, I grew up in rural Florida, where farming was one of the main employers for folks. And so I'm personally really looking forward to hearing Erica's take on some of the policy and local issues and how we can all work to affect change in that regard. So thank you so much for joining us, Erica. Next we have Richard Garcia, who is the Executive Director and co founder of Alma backyard farms. Alma exists to reclaim the lives of formerly incarcerated people repurpose lands into productive farm plots, and reimagine disenfranchised communities across Los Angeles as a hub for transport for transformation. So Richard has a really interesting background. It will be which will be fascinating for us to dig more into during this conversation. He studied at St. John's seminary college and has extensive experience in pastoral ministry inside juvenile justice halls and prisons. And as a pastoral minister, youth advocate and urban farmer. Richard knows how growing food is a transformative way of bringing people together bringing communities together and incorporates principles of restorative justice into their urban farming efforts. So thank you so much, Richard, for joining us. I'm glad you put your Alma farms name and your zoom handle so everyone knows who you are. So thank you so much for doing that. And brand new branded t shirt, which I also love. Really, really looking forward to hearing from you today. And then finally, we have Claudine Nyan, who is the Director of Development and partnerships at amber waves farm, which is a nonprofit located in Amagansett, New York. And I'm really sorry if I pronounced that wrong, please correct me later on if I did.

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They are an Oceanside farm. So amber waves unites food and community with the mission to provide really rich educational opportunities in agriculture for aspiring growers, thoughtful cooks and eaters of all ages, and so they're part of the fabric of local farms and worked closely with food pantries in their area to feed their neighbors. There's a quiet but really dire need for food security by over 10% of the local residents where they're located, and which led them in 2022, to donating over 15,000 pounds of produce locally to neighbors in need. Their amber waves food security program works to humanize and advance the experience of picking up donated food by providing fresh, high quality produce that is culturally relevant to the community, which will be a really, really interesting facet to dig into throughout our discussion today. So thank you so much Claudine for being a part of our panel. And with that, I want to go ahead and dive right in. And I think it would be helpful to just start with the basics. I want to ask each of you about what led you to the work you're doing now. Give us a little bit of sense about your background and why you do the work that you do at ALMA at the Florida Food Policy at amber waves farms. And so I would love Claudine, could we start with you

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thanks Kimberly.

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Thanks everyone for joining us. I am my name is Claudine, my pronouns are she and her. I'm currently located in Denver. But my work is at in Amagansett, which is on Long Island. In New York. We're currently farming on Mon takut land. I started in Memphis, Tennessee. I was training and launching new beginning farmers there. And during that time, I felt like everyone was like, I'm a, I was trying to be a blogger.

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Like, I'm a foodie, I'm a foodie. And, and at the end of the day, I was like, what does this really mean? And it brought me to food and farming and that shared space of like, cultural relevance, storytelling, and then ultimately, like, Where does food come from? And that's obviously this land, and how do we steward relationships with food and farmers and then the people that we get it to. So for the last couple of years, I've been in food and farming space.

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And Signet, pretty significantly was on the road with another company called outstanding in the field and was traveling to like, hundreds of farms across the country.

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And I saw this like denominator of needing to bring people to the table. But oftentimes, these events like were not accessible to

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a lot of the folks that I'm currently serving now. So

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when I was on tour, I found amber waves and saw the way that they were farming, and was also inspired by like, the people who were farming this land, and the way that they were honoring this land, I saw a lot of like,

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queer and brown and indigenous people of color. And like, I really identify with that. And so when I was like, looking for a place to work post pandemic, I knew that I wanted to work within that, within that space. So

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that's how I got to him to in the middle of nowhere, in the Hamptons, feeling like, oftentimes really far away from the city, but really, so close to the folks that I really identify with.

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That's beautiful. Thank you for sharing that with us. Thanks for having me. Yeah. Richard, I wonder if you'd be comfortable going next.

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Sorry. Hi.

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The reason for me doing what I do, yeah, give us your story. Yes, there's, there's a long version and the longer version. So I'm going to give neither

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but I'll cut to the chase with regards to why I do

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what I do and I think over time, the reasons evolve the reasons why we do things evolve.

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And there have been things that remain constant

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you know, and I suppose that you know,

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you know, the interest in this particular realm of work for me with with food and formerly incarcerated folks you know, people in transition places in transition

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the reason why I do it is this This may sound selfish but it's because it sparks tremendous joy for me.

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And

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you know, I think, I think

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the joy comes from from the very connection that happens through food.

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But food is only you know, kind of one dimension of, of what I call relational farming.

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You know,

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we we grow food of course, to feed people as as there's tremendous need.

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But I you know, in our name, Alma, Alma, in Alma, in, in Spanish translates to soul. So I often tell people that we, we grow food not not simply to nourish the palate, but really to, to nourish the soul. So

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I do what I do, because of the profound joy that it's brought to me. And the likelihood as I will continue to do that, for that very reason.

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That's, that's my answer.

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I love that and I had to jack down, nourish the palate and nourish the soul because I think that's such a beautiful sentiment and I think

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you share it. It's not a selfish desire to have this want to do purposeful work, and Claudine, I heard that in what you shared as well. This desire to be around your people and find your people and to be putting your time and energy each day to a cause that you really believe in and I know we have a

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lot of folks on the line who work at nonprofits themselves or who are looking for volunteer opportunities with nonprofits. And so this,

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this desire of I want to put my skills to good use is going to be a really strong one with this crowd. So I'd encourage us to dive into that even deeper throughout. But Erica, I want to hear your introduction. I want to get to know more of your story and what led you to the work that you do day to day.

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Yes, good afternoon, everyone. Can you all hear me? Okay? Yes.

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My name is Erica Hall. I am the executive director in the boy Champa Florida Food Policy Council. I am physically located in St. Petersburg, Florida, on the indigenous lands of the Seminole, Toka bog and collusive strives. I do what I do, I think is starting to weigh on grew up. My parents were involved in Neighborhood and Community Leadership in my neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, where I was born and raised. My dad managed to started a community garden in the neighborhood, one of the first investors status then. And then my mom worked at a todos Co Op at Park Slope. So that was my first introduction into community service and doing things, noticing that my mom had to put her hours into co op in order to get to produce for my family, and I'm the oldest of six. So

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that's where it started. Throughout my life and career. I've organized around real life issues in scenarios, rent control, rent stabilization, housing, food insecurity, environmental justice, student rights, reach, I went to Cal State LA, I lived in LA for seven years. And while I was there, I was in California State Student Association and student government. So I organized around student rights, I'm also a veteran. So and I've been homeless. So I've organized around these issues that were based on my real life experiences. So that's really how I became a movement organizer, which kind of led me to being on nonprofit boards. as I went to graduate school, I worked as a legal professional for 20 years. And during Black Lives Matter, the murder of George Floyd and the pandemic, I was the only person of color at my law firm, and I felt that my physical and mental health was not being cared about. So I left I left a lucrative job making great money as a senior legal professional.

And I felt that I was, I was called into this work. So that's what brought me here, I've been on a lot of nonprofit boards, I've always volunteered in the nonprofit space. And being here in Florida, I realized that my presence here is needed. And it was divine intervention. And I am here now, with all the issues around critical race theory and, you know, anti blackness, black people are under attack in this country. We see it every day, and our food and our environment and everything that we do. So for me, my work is more critical than ever. And I'm holding my phone to as I said, because I'm on the road. So that's why I do it. And I'm just happy to be here. Thank you to my other panelists on the panel as well. Yeah, absolutely. I appreciate you sharing your your story, sharing your testimony with us. And you're absolutely right, and thinking we're talking about hunger and food insecurity today. But it's such an intersectional issue. And there's going to be tons of other facets of societal challenges and barriers and systemic issues that are at play in this. And so it'll be interesting to dive into those different facets throughout this conversation. But I want to kick us off by digging more into the work of the organizations that you're currently with so that folks on the line can get a sense of the community that you're each serving and how you're serving them. And so, Erica, I wonder if we could start with you this time first.

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So the question was, who do you serve? Well as the statewide food policy council, we serve the whole state of Florida 67 regions for people that live here or uniform here. Generally, you know, Florida is a huge state. We have from indigenous communities to farm worker communities and mindfully to urban and rural communities. So we serve all of those communities our membership is intersect

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To know, interdisciplinary, and instance generational, so from food systems, workers, academics, community leaders, fisheries or histories, urban planners, full touches that every aspect of every discipline, really, if you think about it, so I think our membership is comprised of that. And so that is who we serve. How do we serve, is through policy, we provide technical assistance and support to our members throughout the state, we have over 180 members, again, in every aspect of every discipline within the food system, soil scientists, stem scientists. So we do community forums, I think I've shared my YouTube page, where we've talked about everything around youth in the food system, platform as matter of women in the food system, every aspect of the food system here, Florida. So we're a think tank of sorts. So we provide capacity building civic engagement, we do a lot of relationship building. And we provide really our members technical support and assistance with anything that they may need help with creating a community garden providing zoning regulations that there's obstacles for you to grow food, helping with grants, grant writing,

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opening forums for people to speak about issues in their community. So I consider us as a think tank for all full related issues in the state of Florida.

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I love that. And as you were sharing initially, I was like, I wonder if she's gonna mention capacity building, because I was just seeing the parallels between your work and taproots work as this connector of resources. And I think that's beautiful. Claudine, do you mind if I go to you next and tell us more about who you're serving and how you're serving them? Sure thing. I just want to like, I don't know, I don't know how we do this on the internet anymore. But I just want to give a big, big pat on the back to the panelists. And I'm like really moved by Erica. In this moment. Girl, you are busy. Mama, you are busy. You are doing the work. Thank you so much. You are inspiring. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

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Um,

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I already forgot the question. I'm, I am verklempt. No, you're fine.

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I'm so glad you took the moment to give Erica her flowers. And Richard, you as well. I'm feeling the same way in this moment, as I always am in these community panels. But Claudine would love to hear more about the work your organization is specifically doing with the community members that you're serving, and then how you're going about serving them. Yeah. Okay. So amber waves was launched like 15 years ago. And our goal was to train and launch new beginning farmers. So within the community at large, our goal is to be able to launch new farmers so that we have more individuals growing this food.

And so that is the community of individuals that we are serving, because, as of right now, farmers who are going into the workforce going into these communities are going in at a level in which they're getting paid minimum wage. And I think that a lot of the folks who are in the food and farming space, can this resonates kind of like within the the workforce is that like, how do we pay individuals to grow through that's feeding our communities. And what we're doing at amber waves is we're providing them with this skill sets to be able to train and launch them so that they go into managerial positions and leadership positions. And oftentimes policy positions elsewhere. So that's kind of one tear of it, because we there's not very many

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apprenticeship apprentice apprenticeships, that will allow folks to

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build the resume outside of just a crew leader. And then the secondary component is the community on the land that we're currently

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stewarding is that we provide kind of like the first tier of food to our community. So the 15,000 pounds of food that we donated last year is not like this seconds. Something that I really believe in is in the work that we're doing is the power of choice and being able to provide this like I was a food pantry kid and had I had only we have the opportunity to go in and pick the foods that were was culturally culturally relevant to my Filipino community. Growing up in the Mid South in Tennessee

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To you, I would have

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would have just continued to like empower me in the way that I kind of lived in everyday life.

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So we're providing we're donating food to our community. And then we, I live in a seasonal place where quite frankly, like the 1% of the 1% live there. So what we're trying to do with the influx of individuals that we have during the peak season is to provide the opportunities of learning and exploration at little to no cost on the farm. So we're one of the only farms on the east end of Long Island.

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We're a full on working farm where you could like go and pick flowers and herbs and tomatoes, next to a farmer who is working their management position. And so in addition to that, we also provide like cooking classes, seating classes, we provide all kinds of starts for folks to start their own gardens. And we also provide it to our community partners like the Boys and Girls Clubs or the library so that they can also host their own learning spaces. And then each week, we see about 600 kids from local schools, on field trips within our like Amagansett community, but also outside of our community to bring them in so that they have these learning opportunities to better connect them.

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It within our mission statement, it says all all eaters and cooks, and at the end of the day, our goal is to identify is for everyone to identify that they are an eater. And if you don't know yet how to cook, then, you know, we can teach you how to do that. Yeah, it can be a universal skill. And I think one of the interesting, or one of the things that's striking me in this moment is just this, the power of coalition building, that both you and Erica have touched on so far. And so we really interesting to continue diving into that. But Richard, curious to hear your perspective on the same question. So tell us a little bit more about Alma and the work that you're doing the services that you're providing? Sure.

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I think I'll just take one minute to describe some of our philosophy that underlies our work. I think there are a lot of presumptions about growing food.

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And I think in the beginning,

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when we were looking for land,

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whether that was a backyard, or a vacant lot, I think in the beginning, I would oftentimes say, you know, we're gonna grow X amount of food to feed X amount of people.

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Which, which is something we do today still. But I think, over the course of the last 10 years of our existence, I've recognized that there's there's more of a law of reciprocity.

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Where

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the relationship between people plants and placed

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matters insofar as as I've learned that the plants are my teacher,

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that the vacant lot turned into productive, productive one has been my teacher. So we operate with a sense of reciprocity, where

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the relationship between

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the people who grow the food and the people who eat the food and the place that provides a space for the food mat matters.

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That being said,

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how do we how do we nourish

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the community's soul? It's translated into three

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programs we have

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what we call a job training program for folks who are formerly incarcerated, where they learn and acquire skills

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or sharpen skills that range from basic plumbing and irrigation, carpentry

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to the the actual

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movements of growing food and then bringing it to market, or, in other words, making it available and distributing the food. That's one. The second one is we have what we call peas in a pod.

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And that's our youth programming

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where we focus on connecting young people to the land.

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Recognizing that the relationship developed over time is one where we're mutually

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nurturing each other, the land nurtures us, we nurture the land.

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And we serve kids from pre K through through high school really.

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And finally, we have

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our social enterprise is our farmstand.

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Where we distribute what we grow,

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we have a farmstand based on a pay what you can model, no one's turned away.

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That's what you can afford.

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It's what you need, take what you need.

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And every other week in Compton,

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we have

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anywhere between three to 400 folks come by and source produce. But

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you know, really, more than that, I think,

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you know, over the over the experience of sourcing produce people,

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people break barriers, because a lot of conversation has had over how to prepare food.

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Intergenerational work, I think I noticed and witnesses when parents send their children or grandparents and their grandchildren

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talk about what they're going to prepare for that evening, based on what what is source.

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In terms of,

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you know,

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I sometimes simply put what what we do is bring good energy into the world.

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Or honor the good energy that's there.

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That's, you know, it's it's easier to,

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to understand it if you're there in person. So if anyone's ever out in Compton, swing by an open invitation.

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That's wonderful. And so I really, really appreciate the deep dives rich, Claudine and Erica, that you've, you've each provided because at this point, I would love to start getting some conversations and some folks who are on the line involved and think about if what each of our panelists has shared has sparked something for you. Because you're working at a nonprofits involved in farming or food banking, or food insecurity in some way, we'd love to hear your perspective. I also know we have some folks in the line who are interested in figuring out how they can work alongside these causes and donate their skills. So please use the zoom,

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raise hand feature so we can know who to call on next. And in the meantime, I do have some questions that were submitted in advance from folks. So I'm going to start there. But please drop your questions into the chat or raise your hand we'd love to start pulling other folks into this conversation.

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So

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let me give rich and quality both their flowers as well, because 30 minutes is something that I'm very involved in, which is Leadership and Mentoring. I call it the pipeline of leadership developing the next generation of leaders. And then rich talks about reentry, which is extremely important, especially in Florida right now, with a lot of people coming out and not being able to reintegrate back into their communities. And here in Florida, they're not allowed to receive SNAP benefits if they have felony drug convictions. So that causes a high rate of recidivism among black and brown people. So I just wanted to mention that to Boyer, for inspiring me, as well, which.

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Thank you so much for that. And, John, I want to jump over to you because I'm familiar with John's work at the Midtown South Community Council and I know he's working in a few different issues, hunger and food access being one of them in the New York, the greater New York metropolitan area. So John would love to hear if you had something to add.

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It looks like you may be muted.

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Yeah, thanks again. Great work guys. Really appreciate hearing from you. I have been in midtown south area of Manhattan for a long time we 36 years with the council. We started getting progressive.

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About 1020 years about 20 years ago. We have an urban farm in the city.

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We have a small farm upstate and we distribute to our network. So I'm with you all, what you're doing and it's very appreciated. I'm just wondering

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I imagine you guys have websites, or some of you do, some of you may not.

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And I was wondering, I think it might be a good opportunity for us all, to have some sort of landing page together or communication site or kind of coalesce, and where people can see what these independent farmers are doing, and such as you and the mentoring and the possibilities. I know, the city has, like, you know, outreach, and,

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you know, they have their big corporations, but I feel like that working on the ground like this, going directly to our, our network, I think it reaches people that manette these big foundations don't miss and then a lot of that money goes to, of course, the operators and so forth. And, and we we work on,

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we work on the ground, and a lot of volunteers and I don't really get paid much at all. So I'm with you guys. I'd like to grow, I'd like to connect, I like to break down the silos and and if there's some way we can coalesce and maybe find a way to build a platform together, that would be great.

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Thank you, John, for that. I wonder if we have any reactions from panelists? How how can people in this space break down silos, as John mentioned, and get together whether it's a web page or whether it's other ways we can build coalition and build power in the food access space? Claudine, I feel like I saw a reaction from you. I wonder if you want to unmute and address what John shared?

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I guess I do think really, Hi, John. I'm also working in the in the New York area, but kind of on the on on the east end, we have a few kind of like, local online organizations, we work really closely in like, quite frankly, Google Groups, where we share both resources, and then also like regional problems that we have in that space.

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Yeah, and to that note, I was just thinking about how during the pandemic, I launched this, another nonprofit called Grange and company that what we were trying to do was like, provide the services that our friends had like website, building, copy, copy, and content creation, driving force does literal logistics,

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and was like, wow, I have so many friends who have like the ability to do these things. And I don't, or maybe I have one or two hours to write some copy for my friends who are doing this work. Or perhaps I can aggregate the details of future CSAs that are like, run by smaller nonprofits, so that there are individuals investing in those in those spaces.

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But that was a little bit more grassroots. And then I was like, then I found tap root and I was like, tap root. But I didn't, it was just in a very small silo. So yeah, I would be happy kind of within the New York area to to continue this conversation and, and meet especially because I'm on the other end, where in in the were in New York or your your growing spots. We have the urban farm right there at 53rd street between eighth ninth, I've tried to get some more places around the city, but sometimes I hadn't been able to focus real heavily on it. And but I think that it will grow and my the two acre farm is in the Hudson Valley. So the urban farm in the city that year before last, we got almost 800 pounds of food out of it last year, we did have because the mites got ahold of it, and and the birds were eating the greens and, and so I guess they heard about it from last year. And they brought their family and, and then the city that we started late with the Upstate farm. And just within like, two months, we did 800 pounds of greens. And so the potential of it, and we only did a quarter of the property, just a quarter of those two acres.

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I'm curious to know from like up from the other panelists, and also maybe like an aggregation of the participants that we have is that oftentimes in the food and farming space, we're talking to the same people who have the same message, right? Like we're all within the same congregation, we all have the same problems. And there's two components to it is that like one we're not we don't know the language of the things that we're asking for. Like I'm looking for a new CRM that puts together my CSA, my community members, the kids in the classes, the partners that we have, and like the food pantry partners, but what is what am I even saying? And like, does that exist out in the world? So I'm curious to know, like, does everyone have this problem?

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Whew, that's not in the food and farming space.

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I wonder if Erica, you could add your voice here because you're at a really interesting position of, of being exposed to many organizations working in this space, but also from a policy level other nonprofits across Florida. And so I'm wondering if you have a response to what Claudine was just broaching?

09:27:53

Well, for us, we focus on building relationships. And again, we wrote intersectionally. So you know, some of the some of our partners like the Sierra Club, and, you know, other groups around the state that work on intersectional issues like urban planning, we have tech people as a part of our council, but they, you know, they help provide technical support to groups that may need a new website, or like you said, put in a CRM or provide, you know, ideas. But for me, the most important part of my work is the relationships that I've built. In the three years that I've been the chair slash de facto EDI, as well as their relation to relationships and partnerships. And Florida is so important to partner with urban planners, as I said, the built environment experts, architects, soil scientists, people don't realize that farming and agriculture is a science. Agriculture is a science. So soil science is extremely important to growing pool if your soil is contaminated.

And if you don't know the condition of your soil, you can't grow food, if your water is polluted, if your air is polluted, if there's noise pollution, and things that are causing health disparities, that intersected with food and security, as well as environmental justice issues, so partnering with other groups like AARP, NAACP, or your local neighborhood associations, that for me, that's been the best practice to the testament of our work is the relationship this that we built from Florida rule legal services to farmworkers association of Florida, again, NAACP, so we reach out to American Planning Association, they have a food systems division. So my partnerships and my relationships is really what help us to do the work that we do, because we have a very small staff, and all volunteers and a bare bones budget. So without the in kind donations that we received from our partners and stakeholders, a lot of our activities wouldn't get done. So I would say, look at your sphere, look at your circle. And if you haven't been built in that start to build that.

09:30:27

Absolutely, Sharon, would love to hear from you.

09:30:31

So I couldn't figure out how to raise my hand. Like, you're fine. You didn't physically raise my real hand. So I just sent Claudine, a note with an article like about the best CRMs. So our our consultancy works with two major food banks, but also works with lots of other things. The first answer is yes. Yes, everybody has similar problems and challenges in fundraising and getting volunteers like it's all very similar. I have to tell you, what John said is fascinating to me. Because what in my last job, all I did was partnerships, working together.

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Is is the way to grow together.

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You know, finding people, especially if it's not necessarily because you're geographically close sometimes, you know, if you had a similar charity in 10 cities, imagine going to a corporate partner and saying, We're gonna deliver this amazing

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these amazing outcomes in 10 of your most important regions. So you know, a lot of what COVID has taught us it was taught me is you got to think bigger, because you know, and do things other people don't do because then you get to, to get to deliver more funds to deliver more outcomes and feed more people.

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And also, I want to throw out other thing, we just are working on a partnership for one of our clients. That's a food bank. That is a

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totally different category. Another thing I'd suggest you think about is when you deliver on your

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addition, who's standing near you.

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You don't have to have a matching mission to be a good partner. Sometimes you have to serve the same people.

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And I have done so many of the partnerships I've done in my career have come out of that space. Like take one family, they are food insecure. So your

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you will feed them. But maybe that also means they need clothes, or they need emergency housing, or they need something else. So all of a sudden, you get to circle people and super deliver and, you know, change your life. But that's all I'm saying. You know, someone told me how to raise my hand for next time.

09:33:18

I love this that sentiment around Look who's standing next to you think that's really important. I think that underlines Erica and John, I think what you both were referring to when it comes to the intersectionality of coalition building, and who else is working geographically and also non geographically expanding that that aperture as Sharon was mentioning, I we have some good questions in the chat. So I do want to make sure that we touch on those. So starting with

09:33:49

Shai Rita, I specialize in cannabis agriculture and hemp farming, how can we incorporate this crop specialty into environmental food systems and overall wellness? And so I'm curious, Rich.

09:34:03

Erica Claudine, I wonder if your work has touched on this space at all. And we'd love to hear your perspective. Rich. Go ahead. Sure. Um,

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sometimes I look at what we're growing. brassicas, root veggies. And I think should we be growing? Cannabis we'll be doing all right, financially. But we're not doing that.

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And I, but but I do. I've come across cannabis growers. In fact,

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one of the folks who was incarcerated, he did some federal time

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for growing cannabis back when it was not legal.

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So we'd always poke fun at me and he'd say, you know, for all the work we're doing.

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If we had just to two customers for the cannabis, we'd be alright.

09:35:01

But

09:35:04

we're growing vegetables, seasonal vegetables.

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And so I'm not going cannabis. But I do have at our farmstand

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we've incorporated

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local local artisans and local

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makers, one of whom makes

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ointments and creams

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with with cannabis. And so I think

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I think one way to look at what you grow, in order to incorporate it at at some other level is to see what other added we call it added value products. So

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you know, our motto is like nothing goes to waste. And I kind of take that pretty literally. So

09:36:01

if the last

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line last option for whatever we're growing is the compost pile, it'll still be

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turned into something of value. And so

09:36:14

I can't give you insight with cannabis other than like if there's added value products, where we're either young people or you have some entrepreneurial minded person on your crew who wants to say like, I could make ointments out of this, I can make something out of this.

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So we just started dabbling with flowers,

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growing flowers, in addition to vegetables.

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And this is this is just my take on added value.

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You know there are there are flowers that are edible. And then there are flowers that we could make

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for arrangements. making arrangements creates other job opportunities for people to now get into floral arrangements.

09:37:01

There's a point where flowers could also be dried.

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So creating added value would mean for me it would be drying flowers for dried flower arrangements so that

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the lifecycle of whatever you're growing could go pretty far.

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That's my only take with regards to

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to what you're doing with cannabis if you could

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turn it into an added value product like, like an ointment or a cream. And and in fact,

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he does very well, this this local maker, ozone.

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Ozone is the name of his business, he does very well and has great relationships with the people who have really by word of mouth spread the word on how good his his product works. That's my only thought on cannabis.

09:37:58

With incorporating it into overall wellness.

09:38:01

We appreciate that. Looking at the full ecosystem, Erica? Yes, I work with a lot of black farmers here in Florida throughout the South. So I know him Florida, cannabis licensing is an issue and African Americans have been kind of left out of that. So I just found out one of my colleagues does a farm they have gotten the first license that African American farmer has received. So I agree with rich about creating products from the flower. But also, again, to my point about relationships, who's in your sphere, who's in your circle around you, the Association of Black Farmers and other black farmers that may have connections to cannabis growers, and farmers within, you know, your respective communities. So again, it's about the people that you know, and over relationships reaching out to organizations like women grow, that has a woman trying to grow cannabis, they can provide you tools and tips and resources for your farm. So again, looking at the resources that are

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That's great advice, and we can include women grow in our follow up email. And I think that there's already been a few things, Sylvia to the question that you dropped in the chat saying that your organization is looking to get additional sources of funding for women and hunger. There's been a few resources called out during this call that I think hopefully will be helpful for you.

09:39:41

But I wonder if in these closing couple of minutes, we could go around our panelists and just share maybe like a rapid fire. If you were in a position where your organization is a startup, and you're exploring funding opportunities, what advice would you give to someone in that position? Claudine, do you mind if we start with you first?

09:40:04

Um, I do mind I was just actually thinking about answers to street as question I was trying to please talk about carbon sequestration and in nutrient health.

09:40:15

Can you come back to me? I'm sorry? Of course, of course. And actually, why don't we pause the the new question that I just dove into, I would love to hear your thoughts on which I read I had brought up before. Okay. I was thinking about like not having to one of the things that I'm currently learning in launching a few projects that we haven't Amber. And maybe this also kind of goes into the, to the note of,

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to the answer to the next question is like not reinventing the wheel, but creating, like filling in spaces that need help. So Shari, does it like hemp enhances soil? So can Is there a narrative like within? Can you utilize tap that existing tap root resources to say like, How do I tell the story of

09:41:06

him that kind of fits the existing narrative that we have around the importance of like reciprocity, and food and farming and health? Are there existing farms that you can already partner with that you can share your seeds, seeds and starts with that would help that could be participatory and their spaces also, and kind of like extend the partnership there, in addition to thinking about like, how do we value add and increase value to like the dollars that could potentially be going back and into your pocket? But like, isn't, isn't him? Isn't it just kind of like a good plant in the soil. And so just kind of like starting at this very simple

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storytelling and education sharing of what the plant is because

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by I think, to the point of like, bridge, there's just like, another story that is kind of like in the background of cannabis and how that some folks just kind of having graduated from. And so let's utilize the resources that taproot has to like enhance your story and kind of parallel to the existing narrative. That is the truth now. Yeah, that value proposition that narrative that you're crafting is super

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important, I do share your I do want to hear your perspective. But I want to be cognizant that we are at the end of the scheduled hour. And so if people do need to jump, please feel free. We're going to continue recording. And we'll stay on for another couple of minutes to continue the conversation with folks who can who can stay with us. But if you need to jump, please, we don't want to hold you we know you're very busy people will follow up with resources that were mentioned during this conversation, and ways to get involved, engaged with all of our panelists later this afternoon or tomorrow morning. So please jump if needed shy Rita, we'd love to hear your response to what panelists have shared so far.

09:43:09

So I am a garden to table, a hub for nature. However, my specialty is crop, specialty, and cannabis and hemp. And I was looking to see how can I get connected to some rural

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agricultural cannabis farmers and urban hemp farmers, I live in

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the city. And so it's kind of challenging for me to get access to licensed

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rural growers, farmers, and I believe that that would enhance my

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thinking and abilities to bring that back to desert foods communities, such as the community that I serve. And so that's one of my main purposes, is to be able to connect to a farmer that actually does

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that growth, outdoor growth.

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And so I'm interested in it as far as like, how to close food gaps, and to promote health and wellness as far as health goes. Yeah. So figuring out how to make those initial connections with peers who are in your space, but also potentially funders, and partners, who could support organizations in your space too, which I think relates back to what Silvia had put in the chat too, regarding her organization, which is at its earlier stages. So it'd be curious to get advice on just making those initial relationships and building those those bridges for like a younger organization. Rich, Claudia and Erica, if you have any thoughts on that.

09:45:02

Bridge, please go ahead. Sure. So So I read I hear what you say. and I

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when we started I, I don't have a background necessarily in in farming. So I apprenticed myself to whoever was was willing to teach me now it's not just whoever I would observe

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who I thought had game, who I thought had some real level of expertise in executing their operation, who I thought was a real operator. I and so I, I put myself out like I'm willing to to work for free for you to share your knowledge with me.

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That that's how I personally would approach it if I was looking to be a dang good cannabis grower, I would look out for who really is knowledgeable.

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And I would also say like, who loves who loves the plant and the whole planting game, like who loves that it's not the person who just sees the

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the end result of of massive profit that might be available but who loves what the cannabis plant can do.

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There is a there is a person

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you know, I have some level of connection maybe maybe still, but there's a there's a there's a product called potli P O TLI. And it's it's based on

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infusing

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kitchen pantry items with with cannabis.

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I think the story goes the founder knew the health benefits of cannabis. But because the plant and the and what it historically it's been been stigmatized, right. So she couldn't introduce the plant to a family member because of the stigma associated with the with the plan, but she introduced it through food. So she infused certain foods that were culturally relevant and introduce that to a family member and the family member experienced benefits from that. So she's she's learned to take the product and add it to

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A food, kitchen pantry items, but I think

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the only thing I could think is and I don't know anyone off off off the top my head with regards to who grows? who grows cannabis really well.

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But if I was to do it, I would I would definitely seek out somebody who I'd have observed as as really up on their their game.

09:47:53

Yeah, I also really like your anecdote of food being a gateway of sorts to a greater understanding of broader understanding of, you know, different issues or different barriers. Claudia and Erica, any thoughts on the question that shy Rita and and Sylvia had posed around the initial building of relationships or the initial approach

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to finding support.

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I would say that,

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I would just

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probably parallel to like the work that we do as nonprofit individuals, specifically in my work, I'm, I'm development, fundraising and partnerships, so that I just like, don't have

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I like do my research beforehand, there's due diligence on the individual that I'm communicating with. And then I just go for full transparency with my plan and make the ask,

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I guess, like, really closely to relationships in general, unless you say what you're looking for, then.

09:49:05

They don't know. And part of the strategy that I've seen in working at amber waves and then working with kind of like, fire level sponsors and partners that I haven't seen previously, is, the amount of transparency that I've had with my partners has been tremendous, because that also opens gates to them to be more vulnerable. With me. I used to look at like corporate social responsibility and think I need to be corporate to do that.

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And what I've noticed in the in this space is that

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there's have I've had so many connections, even if in the very moment doesn't necessarily go into dollars, but another connection, and sometimes, where sometimes we're the organization that is providing within that connection, so and that at the end of the day is kind of like the work that we're we're doing.

09:50:08

And then we'll be able to make the ask, right. So like if I go to a donor or sponsor, and I'm like, I'm looking for $100,000, to do this thing, and they're like, We don't have that right now. But we do have this other partner who has lumbar, and then that partner comes in, and then my, then my original donor will be like, Oh, now that there's two of you, I see that there's buy in and investment from other people, I can come in now and potentially match another donor, then, you know,

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you know, I always ask for grace in in those asking spaces, but

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I just had to kind of give where I'm working on farms, I don't have the luxury of like walking in and always having offices or even Wi Fi. So

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my suggestion is buy,

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like soften the spaces where you where you think that you have to come in hot, and just be more vulnerable and asking,

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saying, that's really, really important advice. And I would add, I was just in a conversation with Bridgespan, who's this nonprofit group, they do a lot of research in across the sector. And they were sharing

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the top advice that they give to their nonprofit partners, and we're talking like huge nonprofits, who can afford to work with an organization like bridge ban is you need to ask for what you need. Stop softening your ask you need to come in and share transparently. This is what it is going to take to solve this issue. This is what our organization needs in order to make this happen. Because historically, only white male leaders of nonprofits have been able to make the ask for the full amount that it's actually going to take to solve a challenge. And they've seen they have tons of data points on this and should go to the bridge span site and they have so so much good stuff to dig into. But historically, this has been really really difficult for women, especially women of color, other people of color to go in and say confidently, this is what it's going to take to do this thing. And that's

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But funders are demanding from us. So yes to everything Claudine said, and also yes to just going in and you are the expert in that room, you're the expert and knowing what resources are it's going to take to make this thing possible. And so own that space and take it up.

09:52:45

Alright, right, I see we're 10 minutes past the hour and rich and Erica and Claudine I so appreciate everything that you've shared. And I don't want to take up too much more of your time. So I'm thinking I'm gonna go ahead and wind us down now. But I will share all of your contact details, your LinkedIn, your organization's websites will be shared with everyone who registered for this panel. So definitely encourage folks to please continue these conversations. Even though the Zoom Room is closing, we definitely want to keep the conversations going. So please reach out to one another. I see such power here and possibility in terms of coalition building, just with even the folks that were in this room today, talking and sharing about their ideas and their needs. I find that beautiful. So please, let's keep that going. And thank you again to our panelists. I really, really appreciate the time and energy you spent with us today.

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Thank you.

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Thank you.

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Thanks, everyone. Bye now.