

Strategic Planning Workshop Brief

From Insight to Action: Advancing Our Shared Food Network Priorities Through Collective Deliberation

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Lieu: Common Ground Food Forum, Orillia, ON.

Hosted by: CAFS Strategic Planning Committee

Format: 90-minute workshop

Participants: 40 participants + 3 facilitators

On June 17, 2026, the Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS) Strategic Planning Committee hosted the workshop “From Insight to Action: Advancing Our Shared Food Network Priorities Through Collective Deliberation,” as part of the *Common Ground Food Forum: Building a Bigger Table: Strengthening Our Relations*, held from June 15 to 18, 2026, in Orillia, Ontario.

The workshop brought together members of the Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS), the Common Ground Network, Food Secure Canada, and the Food Communities Network. It was intentionally designed to foster exchange and strengthen relationships across CAFS and related food studies, food systems, and food justice networks. Participants included researchers, practitioners, activists, farmers, fisherfolk, Indigenous rights holders, students, community-based food practitioners, and policy-engaged actors. Although participants’ network affiliations were not formally recorded, most attendees appeared to be affiliated with CAFS.

The session invited participants to reflect on their current work, identify opportunities for collaboration, and strengthen connections across food studies and food systems networks. More broadly, the workshop aimed to make visible the diverse research, initiatives, projects, and actions already underway across the network, while supporting new pathways for shared learning and practical engagement, and collective action.

The workshop was organised around two central objectives. The first was to collectively reflect on and situate participants' current food-related work along a Knowledge-to-Action continuum. The second was to seed intersectoral and interdisciplinary connection opportunities across food networks. These objectives were informed by key insights from the [CAFS Strategic Planning Report](#), which described CAFS as a welcoming, inclusive, and intellectually generative community. The report also highlighted members' expectations that CAFS serve both as a scholarly convener and as an active contributor to food systems change.

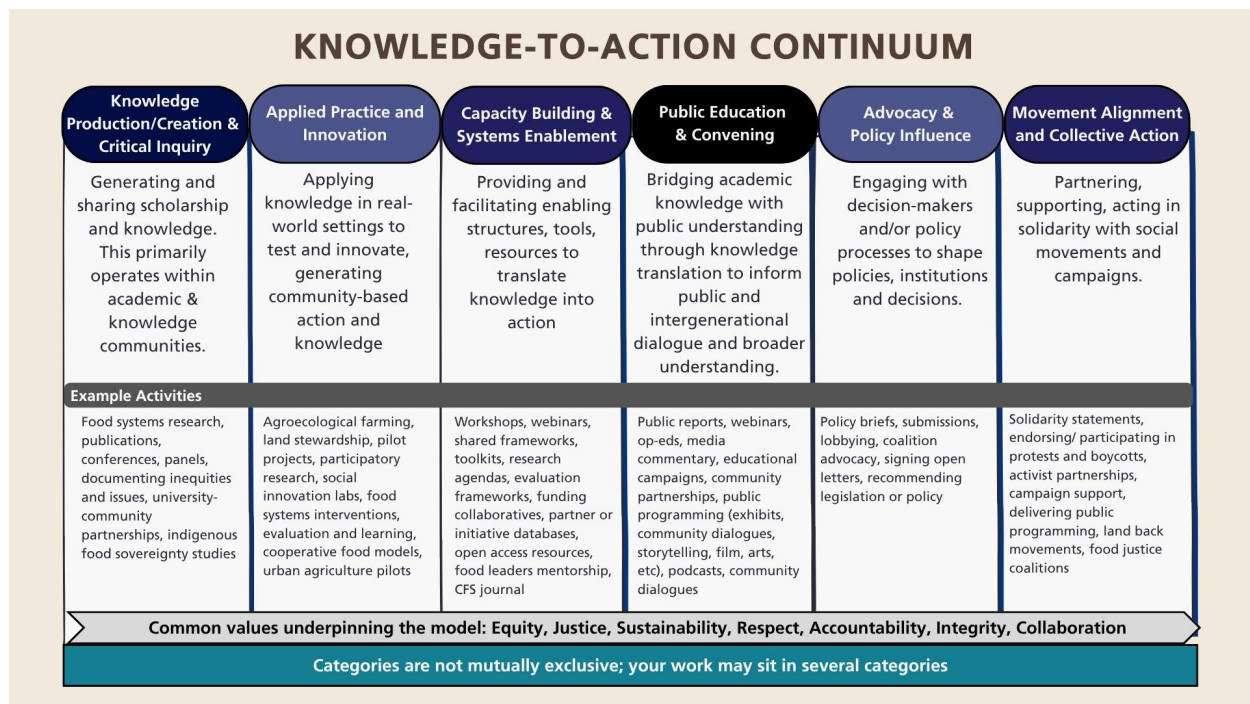
To advance these objectives, the workshop included two linked activities. The first activity invited participants to map current work across a Knowledge-to-Action continuum. The second built on that mapping by asking participants to consider what kinds of relationships, tools, resources, and support are needed to strengthen collaboration and move shared priorities into action.

Activity #1: Reflect and Post-It

The first activity, "Reflect and Post-It," invited participants to map their current food-related work onto a shared Knowledge-to-Action continuum. Participants were asked to write each project, initiative, activity, or action they were involved in on a separate post-it note. They then identified which projects they were open to collaborating on by adding a jewel sticker, along with their name and email address where they wished to invite follow-up connection. Finally, participants placed each post-it under the category of the Knowledge-to-Action continuum that best reflected the project's current orientation.



Knowledge-to-Action Continuum



Designed by Diana Chu., 2026

The placement of stickers revealed a significant appetite for collaboration among participants. Of the 91 projects, initiatives, activities and actions identified during the activity, 76 (84%) were marked with stickers and/or contact information, indicating a willingness to connect, share knowledge, and explore future collaborative opportunities. In many cases, participants also provided their contact information, creating clear pathways for follow-up beyond the workshop itself. A list of projects for which participants expressed openness to collaboration, along with the contact information they provided, is included in Appendix A.

Overall, 38 unique contributors (33 individuals and 5 organizations/groups) participated in the activity. This transformed the mapping exercise from a descriptive activity into a practical collaboration tool, making visible not only the breadth of ongoing work already underway across networks, but also areas of shared interest and readiness for exchange, partnership, and collective action. The results highlight opportunities to strengthen connections across research, practice, education, policy, and movement-oriented spaces within the food systems community.

What Are We Seeing Across the Knowledge-to-Action Continuum?

Activity #1 revealed the breadth and depth of food systems work already taking place across networks. Participants mapped work across all six categories of the Knowledge-to-Action model, demonstrating engagement in research, applied practice, capacity building, public education, advocacy, and collective action. At the same time, the distribution of post-its suggests that some parts of the continuum are more strongly represented than others.

The strongest concentration of work appeared in Category A: Knowledge Production/Creation and Critical Inquiry, followed by Category D: Public Education and Convening. This suggests that the networks have a particularly strong base in research, critical analysis, public-facing education, storytelling, convening, and knowledge sharing. In other words, participants are especially active in researching, documenting, analyzing, explaining, and communicating food systems issues.

Because most attendees appeared to be affiliated with CAFS, this pattern may partly reflect the composition of the group and CAFS's established role as a scholarly convener. Although the workshop was open to members of several related food networks, the distribution of activities should therefore not be interpreted as representative of the relative strengths or priorities of those networks as a whole. Rather, the activity offers a snapshot of the work represented among those who participated.

Nevertheless, the pattern is consistent with findings from the [CAFS Strategic Planning Report 2026](#), which describe CAFS as an intellectual community and a connector and convener, while also documenting members' interest in contributing more actively to food systems change. The activity therefore helped make visible not only the range of work already underway, but also the specific areas where CAFS' existing strengths are most apparent.

Areas of Strength

1. A strong critical and justice-oriented knowledge base

Category A (Knowledge Production/Creation and Critical Inquiry) gathered the largest number of contributions. Projects in this category focused on food justice, climate change, land access, labour, food sovereignty, community impacts, political economy, food insecurity, and the historical and structural conditions shaping food systems. This suggests that the networks have a strong

capacity to identify key issues, document inequities, generate critical knowledge, and support community-engaged inquiry.

Overall, Category A showed a strong emphasis on academic and community-based research, with many projects focused on documenting inequities, producing knowledge, and critically analyzing food systems from justice-oriented, anti-colonial, climate, and community-engaged perspectives.

2. A strong public education and convening role

Category D (Public Education and Convening) was also highly active. Participants placed projects here that focused on storytelling, journals, webinars, community events, festivals, curriculum, reports, videos, communities of practice, and informal educational conversations. This suggests that the networks are not only producing knowledge, but also working to make that knowledge more visible, accessible, and meaningful to broader publics.

Category D showed a strong emphasis on translation, storytelling, public engagement, and convening spaces. Many projects aimed to make food systems issues more visible and understandable through journals, webinars, videos, community events, festivals, reports, curricula, and informal learning spaces.

3. Meaningful policy and movement connections

Categories E (Advocacy and Policy Influence) and F (Movement Alignment and Collective Action) were less populated than Categories A and D, but they still showed meaningful activity. Participants identified projects related to municipal food policy, school food, food waste, farmer advocacy, food sovereignty, labour justice, grassroots organizing, movement media, and collective infrastructure. These categories show that the networks already have some pathways into policy influence and collective action, even if those areas appear less dominant than research and public education.

Category E highlighted work that connects food systems knowledge to policy change, advocacy, public decision-making, and institutional reform. Category F emphasized collective organizing, solidarity, food sovereignty, justice-oriented transitions, and movement infrastructure.

Areas for Strengthening

1. Applied practice and innovation appear less represented

Category B (Applied Practice and Innovation) included important work related to food waste reduction, farming access, seed saving, community groceries, food waste reduction, local food collaborations, controlled environment agriculture, and climate-oriented food systems solutions. However, fewer projects were positioned in this category than in the research and public education categories.

This suggests there may be an opportunity to better support the transition from research and public learning into implementation, experimentation, pilot projects, and community-based interventions. Strengthening this area could help ensure that knowledge generated across networks is more consistently translated into practical strategies, tools, and models for change.

2. Capacity building and systems enablement may need more support

Category C (Capacity Building and Systems Enablement) focused on strengthening the systems that allow food work to happen. Participants identified initiatives related to coalition-building, advocacy, resource-sharing, food hubs, farmer-led research, science-policy bridges, and institutional support structures. However Category C appeared to be one of the thinner areas of the map.

This is especially important because many barriers identified later in the workshop, including time, resources, coordination, visibility, relationship-building, and knowledge translation, are precisely the kinds of challenges that capacity-building infrastructure could help address. This suggests a possible opportunity for CAFS and the other networks to invest in shared infrastructure, such as searchable project databases, collaboration tools, funding coordination, mentorship structures, regional food systems maps, policy navigation tools, and other resources that help sustain connections and enable collaboration over time.

3. Policy and movement pathways could be more intentionally connected to research

Although Category E (Advocacy and Policy Influence) and F (Movement Alignment and Collective Action) were clearly present, they appeared less populated than knowledge production. This suggests that while there is important policy and movement-oriented work underway, the pathway from knowledge production to policy influence to collective action could be made more intentional.

Findings from the [CAFS Strategic Planning Report 2026](#) reinforce this interpretation. Members expressed interest in stronger engagement with policymakers, closer practitioner-academic collaboration, more accessible approaches to knowledge mobilization, and deeper relationships

with grassroots organizations and advocacy networks. They also proposed initiatives such as policy briefs, plain-language summaries, policy dialogues, targeted outreach, and informal relational spaces where researchers could share work in progress and receive feedback from scholars, community organizers, practitioners, and policy actors.

Building on these priorities, CAFS may be well positioned to strengthen its role as a bridge between academic research, policy, and practice. For example, CAFS could create opportunities for research teams to identify relevant policy audiences, movement and community partners, public education strategies, and applied pathways earlier in the project lifecycle. Such an approach could help ensure that policy engagement, knowledge mobilization, and opportunities for collective action are considered throughout the research process, rather than primarily after research findings have been produced.

Key Observation

Based on the projects, initiatives, and actions shared by participants in the room, the work mapped during Activity #1 appears to be especially concentrated at the beginning of the Knowledge-to-Action continuum, through research and critical inquiry, and again in the area of public education and convening. By comparison, the “middle infrastructure” of the continuum, particularly applied practice and capacity building, appeared less visible among the examples shared during the workshop. These middle categories are often important because they can help transform ideas, research findings, and public conversations into more durable forms of practice, policy engagement, and collective action.

It is important to note that these observations reflect the contributions of those who participated in the workshop, rather than a comprehensive assessment of the full CAFS network or all related organizations. As such, the mapping should be understood as a snapshot of the work, interests, and collaboration opportunities made visible during this particular session. Even with this limitation, the activity surfaced an important strategic question: how might CAFS and related network organizations strengthen the connective tissue of the Knowledge-to-Action continuum? This includes the relationships, tools, resources, coordination mechanisms, and institutional supports that can help move knowledge into sustained practice, policy change, and movement-aligned action.

The findings from Activity #1 therefore did not provide a complete map of all food systems work across the network, but they did help identify patterns, strengths, and possible gaps among the projects shared by participants. While participants demonstrated substantial engagement in

knowledge production, public education, policy work, and collective action, the relative thinness of applied practice and capacity-building examples raised questions about what kinds of collaboration infrastructure may be needed to better connect these areas over time. In particular, the discussion suggested that moving knowledge into action requires more than shared interest. It also requires relationships, coordination, resourcing, trust, and practical tools that allow people to work together across sectors, disciplines, regions, and communities. These insights provided the foundation for Activity #2, which invited participants to identify the barriers that currently limit collaboration and the tools, resources, or programs that could help strengthen collective capacity for action.

Activity #2: Breakout Conversations on Barriers and Tools

Following the mapping activity, participants moved into breakout conversations. These discussions focused on two guiding questions: first, where participants might be open to connecting more based on their current work; and second, what barriers limit those connections, as well as what tools, resources, or programs could help facilitate stronger collaboration. Each group then shared one barrier and one strategy during the collective discussion.

Summary of Activity #2: Barriers and Tools for Strengthening Connection

During the second breakout activity, participants identified several structural, relational, and practical barriers to collaboration across food studies, food systems research, policy, advocacy, and community-based work. These barriers helped explain why some parts of the Knowledge-to-Action continuum may be more difficult to activate than others, particularly the areas related to applied practice, shared infrastructure, policy pathways, and sustained collective action.

Key Barriers

The most recurring barriers were time, limited resources, labour capacity, funding constraints, and competing priorities. Participants noted that many people are already overextended, managing multiple projects, or working within academic and institutional timelines that make sustained collaboration difficult.

A second major theme was transparency and power-sharing. Participants pointed to a lack of transparency in funding decisions, uncertainty around who pays for what, and the need for more equitable resource-sharing across collaborators and organizations. Power imbalances were also

raised in relation to community-engaged research, policy influence, and corporate concentration in food systems.

Participants also emphasized the importance of addressing the historical relationship between academic research and communities. Some groups noted that academic research has often been extractive, which can create distrust or hesitation among communities. Related barriers included lack of trust with community partners, research questions that do not always reflect community needs, and the difficulty of beginning relationships without existing connections.

Other major barriers included limited visibility of existing work, regional and sectoral disconnects, disciplinary silos, challenges in industry-academic collaboration, language gaps, ideological differences between knowledge holders and policy makers, and emotional barriers associated with cold-calling or cold-emailing potential collaborators.

Tools, Resources, and Programs

Participants proposed a range of tools and practices to support stronger collaboration. One major recommendation was to develop better collaborative infrastructure, such as a research-connect webpage or searchable tool that would make current research, projects, and potential collaborators more visible. Participants also suggested that such a platform should include dedicated resourcing for communities, so that connection does not create additional unpaid labour for community partners.

Participants also identified a need for food systems mapping, particularly mapping that shows regional clusters, relationships, initiatives, and areas of activity. This could help people see where work is happening, where there are gaps, and where new connections may be possible.

Another important set of suggestions focused on relationship-building. Participants named patience, clarity of intention, transparency, curiosity, social gatherings, phone calls, introductions, and trusted connectors as essential supports for collaboration. For Indigenous community connections, participants emphasized the importance of working through a network of relationship holders, rather than relying on cold outreach or starting relationships from scratch.

Participants also called for stronger knowledge translation tools to help translate academic research into accessible formats for communities, policy makers, and public audiences. Popular education, public-facing summaries, media literacy workshops, and tools for navigating decision-making processes were all suggested as ways to bridge gaps between research, policy, and community action.

Overall Takeaway

The workshop suggested that CAFS and related network organizations hold significant knowledge, expertise, creativity, and collaborative potential. Among the participants in the room, projects and initiatives were represented across the full Knowledge-to-Action continuum, from critical research and public education to advocacy, applied practice, capacity building, and movement alignment.

At the same time, the mapping and breakout discussions offered a snapshot of where work appeared to be most visible among workshop participants. Within this group, the strongest concentrations of activity were in knowledge production, critical inquiry, public education, and convening. The discussions also pointed to important opportunities for growth, particularly in strengthening the structures that help move knowledge into action. These include shared infrastructure, relationship-building mechanisms, funding and labour support, project visibility tools, knowledge translation resources, and clearer pathways into policy and collective action.

In this sense, the workshop did not provide a comprehensive map of all food systems work across CAFS or related network organizations. Rather, it documented the work and collaboration interests made visible during this particular session and surfaced a strategic direction for CAFS: to strengthen the connective infrastructure that can help a rich and diverse food systems knowledge community become more coordinated, collaborative, and action-oriented over time.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A: Projects Open to Collaboration and Participant Contact Information

This appendix provides a list of projects, initiatives, and activities identified during the Reflect and Post-It activity for which participants indicated an openness to collaboration, including the contact information they voluntarily shared to facilitate follow-up connections.

Category in Knowledge-to-Action continuum	Name	Email	Project / Initiative / Activity / Action
A. Knowledge Production/Creation and Critical Inquiry	Alexandra Otis	alexandra.otis@umontreal.ca	Research on food insecurity of temporary migrant workers
	Stephanie Eccles	stephanie.eccles@torontomu.ca	Highline Mushrooms: Farm of the Future in Southern Ontario
	Elif Birbiri	elifbir@yorku.ca	Intersection of plastic waste and food systems
	Martha Stiegman	stiegman@yorku.ca	Anti-colonial food systems book
	Kelsey Speakman	kspeakman@wly.ca	FLOW Partnership (Food, Learning, Growing)
	Kristen Lowitt	kristen.lowitt@queensu.ca	Blue justice meets food justice in Great Lakes fisheries
	Christy Kelly-Bisson	ckb644@proton.me	Land title survey of the Annapolis Valley, Mi'kma'ki
	Ali Romdhani	ali.romdhani@fsaa.ulaval.ca	What are the different alternative models of grocery and how can they help community
	Amar Laila	a2laila@uwaterloo.ca	Review of injustices experienced by women in food systems
	Elif Birbiri	elifbir@yorku.ca	Book chapter on tensions between culinary education and apprenticeship in Turkey
	Christy Kelly-Bisson	ckb644@proton.me	Book: The Long Grab
	Rosie Kerr	roseann@uoguelph.ca	Future Harvest partnership

		roseann@uoguelph.ca	Paper about agriculture's role in colonization
	Alissa Overend	overenda@mac.ewan.ca	AFNS in Canada (Alternative Food Networks) mapping/content analysis
	Morgan Sage	morgans@yrfn.ca	Food system report card - York region/Greater Toronto Area
	Luca Galler	gallerl@uoguelph.ca	Scoping review on relationships between controlled environment agriculture and northern communities
	Julia Hambleton	jhamble1@lakeheadu.ca	Research on blue justice in the Great Lakes
		info@throughfood.org	Journalism/media platform focused on food systems and food culture
	Jamila Ewais	j.ewais@outlook.com	What would an international just transition look like?
	Finn Meyer	finn.meyercook@viu.ca	Indigenous food sovereignty and climate action research
	Michael Classens	michael.classens@utoronto.ca	Climate preparedness and food justice in the Greater Toronto Area
	Yukari Seko	yseko@torontomu.ca	TMU CSFS: Meals on Wheels and cultural food provision - mapping project
	Yukari Seko	yseko@torontomu.ca	Faith-based community's approach to food security
	Michael Lawler	a.mikelawler@gmail.com	Dissertation - Understanding mobility of cultural products (Kimchi) across North America
B. Applied Practice and Innovation	Laurel Huget	laurel@foodfirstnl.ca	The Lived and Living Experience Advisory Group (LLEAG) by Food First NL
	Luca Galler	gallerl@uoguelph.ca	Research on controlled environment agriculture with/in northern and remote communities
	Doug Jones	waterloo.region.community.gardens@gmail.com	Local food and climate collaborations

	Doug Jones	waterloo.region.community.gardens@gmail.com	Helping people who want to farm access land
	Doug Jones	waterloo.region.community.gardens@gmail.com	Local food and housing collaborations
	Ali Romdhani	ali.romdhani@fsaa.ulaval.ca	Help community groceries to improve their work. Start a practice community.
	Yukari Seko	yseko@torontomu.ca	Campus food waste reduction
	Sara Dsouza	saradsouzaemail@gmail.com	Supporting food system researchers and actors as needs and opportunities arise
C. Capacity Building and Systems Enablement	Erin Nelson	enelson@uoguelph.ca	Latin America-Canada network-building around gender equity, feminism, agroecology, and agriculture
	Erin Nelson	enelson@uoguelph.ca	Supporting farmer-led research initiatives
	Damon Chouinard	ed@ckfoodpolicy.ca	Collective procurement and demand aggregation social enterprise
	Yukari Seko	yseko@torontomu.ca	TMU CSFS: Co-designing trauma-informed designation strategies for a campus food bank
	Michael Lawler	a.mikelawler@gmail.com	University of Toronto Food Coalition: free meal program and campus food hub on campus
	Rosie Kerr	roseann@uoguelph.ca	Capacity building videos related to farmer-led research
	Morgan Sage	morgans@yrfn.ca	Advocacy workshop and resources, building community capacity to advocate
D. Public Education and Convening	Diana Chu	di.chu@alumni.utoronto.ca	Supper club with menus exploring personal cultural identity
	Alexia Moyer	amoyer@canadianfoodstudies.ca	Canadian Food Studies Journal

	Jayme Melrose	jayme.melrose@ecologyaction.ca	Regional food network, Halifax/Nova Scotia
	Jayme Melrose	jayme.melrose@ecologyaction.ca	Storytelling project: short videos to make community food systems visible
	Damon Chouinard	ed@ckfoodpolicy.ca	Food systems literacy
	Moe Garahan	info@fcn-rcn.ca	Food Communities Network
	Alissa Overend	overenda@macewan.ca	CAFS local chapter in Edmonton
	Urbi Khan	urbi@throughfood.org	Platform reporting on stories through lens of food
	Allison Penner	executive@reimagineagriculture.org	Plant-forward education
		info@throughfood.org	Community events on food system levels and involvement
	Christy Kelly-Bisson	ckb644@proton.me	Land and People / Pillar of the Common Ground Network / newsletters and webinars
		fungifestmtl@gmail.com	Fungi Fest MTL: educational mushroom festival
	Michael Lawler	a.mikelawler@gmail.com	Hungry for Change: chapters focused on student food advocacy
	Yukari Seko	yseko@torontomu.ca	TMU CSFS - Public webinars
	Yukari Seko	yseko@torontomu.ca	TMU CSFS - Campus food security watch report
	Morgan Sage	morgans@yrfn.ca	Working groups and communities of practice in York Region : emergency food sector, farms markets, youth, community members
	Sara Dsouza	saradsouzaemail@gmail.com	Organic informal conversations to increase general knowledge and care about food topics
	Allison Penner	executive@reimagineagriculture.org	Sustainable food education

E. Advocacy and Policy Influence	Michael Classens	michael.classens@utoronto.ca	Toronto food policy
	Damon Chouinard	ed@ckfoodpolicy.ca	Food hub research
	Allison Penner	executive@reimagineagriculture.org	Plant-forward post-secondary food
	Allison Penner	executive@reimagineagriculture.org	Food waste campaign
	Moe Garahan	moe@justfood.ca	Facilitating collaborative policy development at multi-jurisdictions
	Jayme Melrose	jayme.melrose@ecologyaction.ca	Storytelling project - Halifax / short video campaign for advocacy for better food system
	Ayla Fenton	ayla@youngagrarians.org	New farmer and local food systems advocacy, including research collaboration
	Mariia Kozlova	mariiakozlova@uvic.ca	National school food program: advocacy, research publication, knowledge sharing
	Morgan Sage	morgans@yrfn.ca	Ontario municipal election: voter awareness, connecting with candidates, advocacy/building relationships post election
	Morgan Sage	morgans@yrfn.ca	Deputations to municipal governments on local food policy issues
F. Movement Alignment and Collective Action	Stephanie Eccles	stephanie.eccles@torontomu.ca	Biogas/biomethane on Canadian farms: critical perspectives
	Damon Chouinard	ed@ckfoodpolicy.ca	Grow and Connect: community-driven coordination software for regional food systems
		uoftfoodcoalition@gmail.com	University of Toronto Food Coalition: other groups/campuses coalitions and working on alternative food models
	Ali Romdhani	ali.romdhani@fsaa.ulaval.ca	Helping people start a grocery in their community

		info@throughfood.org	Creating accessible media that makes research more digestible on social media and beyond
	Natasha Pennell	nmp768@mun.ca	PhD research documenting local Indigenous (Mi'kmaw) history and supporting the development of a community food hub / food sovereignty strategy
	Kelsey Speakman	kelsey@newgrocerymovement.org	New Grocery Movement: nonprofit grassroots movement redistributing power in food provisioning sector
	Finn Meyer	finn.meyercook@viu.ca	Marine/ocean species, foods, and Indigenous sovereignty
	Stephanie Eccles	stephanie.eccles@torontomu.ca	Just transitions, cellular agriculture, and labour justice for migrant farm workers