



# Anti- Racism in Farmers' Markets: A Toolkit

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# Foreward

By Cheyenne Sundance

**“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”— Desmond Tutu**

When thinking about food justice in terms of agriculture, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and Persons of Colour) are not adequately represented in Farmers Markets nor are they valued as a farmer. Food justice for new and existing BIPOC farmers looks like them also exercising their right to grow, sell and eat healthy culturally relevant food. With many Farmers Markets not centering equity and diversity, many new BIPOC farmers do not have entry into long-standing farmers markets and therefore cannot create a stable livelihood within agriculture.

From my work at Sundance Harvest, I have taught many youth in a free mentorship program I offer seasonally. These youth, like myself, are in their early to mid 20s and BIPOC, many of whom live with multiple marginalizations and/or disabilities. Throughout the 12 weeks of the course I often ask them where they see themselves in agriculture, I am often met with silence or feelings of being unsure. There are a few reasons for that, but the largest being that there is little to no representation at farmers markets. At the Farmers Market that I sell at in the west end of Toronto, I am the only BIPOC farmer. I have been to many other markets in the city where I have observed a similar trend.

If BIPOC youth who want to be ecological and regenerative farmers do not see their own community, culture and personhood reflected at these markets - why would they feel welcomed to start the journey to becoming new farmers?

The roots and legacy of systemic racism in the food system and within agriculture goes deep. There has even been a case study on a popular west end farmers market here in Toronto regarding the racism that is present for a University of Toronto's student's master thesis.

Many BIPOC youth would like to connect with the land and start their careers as farmers but do not see a pathway to economic success with the current lack of representation. I lead the Nation Farmers Union first BIPOC Working Group. There is a working group for women, youth and I thought it was time that there was a BIPOC working group as well. The BIPOC Working Group has been a great success! Many of the over 30 BIPOC farmers coast to coast that showed up mentioned many barriers to agriculture but a common one was a lack of representation. BIPOC farmers exist, but we need to be supported.

Actively working towards being anti-racist as a farmers market manager means making space for BIPOC farmers who have been ignored for too long and taking responsibility for learning more about what inequity within the food system looks like.

As a farmer, educator and youth who is hopeful about the future of agriculture- I urge you to take actionable steps to ensure that everyone has the equal and fair chance to have better representation at farmers markets and within the food system as a whole.

# About the Toolkit

## The Toolkit

This toolkit was developed to assist Farmers Markets in the shared goal of making Farmers Markets more equitable for farmers of colour, especially Black and Indigenous farmers, who have historically and are currently being shut out of the benefits of participating Farmers Markets.

We know that Farmers Markets are powerful platforms to advance local food, incubate small business, support small scale farming, reduce environmental impacts, and build community. That is why it is important to share access to these benefits, with those who face the most challenges. As powerful actors within the local food system, we have a responsibility to making these changes a reality.

This document will be an ever-evolving, growing hub for actions, resources, tools and networks to continue this vital and important work into the future.

## Our Research

In December 2020 we conducted a focus group to help inform our toolkit and better understand the challenges facing BIPOC farmers entering Farmers Markets spaces. Cheyenne Sundance, of Sundance Harvest, spoke with a group of twenty BIPOC youth ranging from 20-30 who are currently in the process of establishing their businesses and careers in farming.

A special thank you goes out to the participants of the focus group for sharing their lived experience and meaningful ideas on how we can make Farmers Markets a more accessible, inviting and equitable space for all.

## Our Purpose

Creating change in the society and communities where we live is not easy. We may be able to identify equity issues within our Markets and begin to understand that they are impacted by larger systemic issues, but knowing what first steps can be taken to make impactful changes are not always clear. Additionally, we may feel that our peers are not willing to join us in our journey to identify and right the inequities we observe in the spaces we occupy. We hope that this toolkit can act as a jumping off point to guide us on taking those first steps as we work towards building lasting equity in our Market communities.

Our primary goal is to increase the representation of BIPOC growers and customers at Farmers Markets in Toronto and across the GTA, making them safer, more welcoming spaces for groups who have been historically marginalized in the food system.

We are a group of BIPOC and white allies who are connected to Farmers Markets as farmers, managers, and customers and are working to make change in markets and food spaces. Please join us.

# Goals

## 1

### Increase Representation

There is a lack of BIPOC representation at Farmers Markets in vendorship and in patronage. We are aiming to change that by addressing the barriers that BIPOC Farmers face and create a market community where everyone feels welcome to grow their businesses.

## 2

### Go Beyond Food

We know that food is undeniably a political issue and Farmers Markets hold a certain power to highlight the intersections of these issues. Farmers Markets provide a platform to share ideas around race, food injustices and land access and the communities that are keen to listen.

## 3

### Invest and Share Resources

In the future, we hope to develop a Farmers' Market mentorship program where seasoned vendors can show new vendors the ropes to help build their capacity and confidence in a market space.

## 4

### Learn and Grow Together

By joining us on this journey you are joining like minded folks who are willing to learn and grow. We hope to partner with educators in food in the future, to run workshops and facilitate our learning.



# What does it mean to be Anti-Racist?

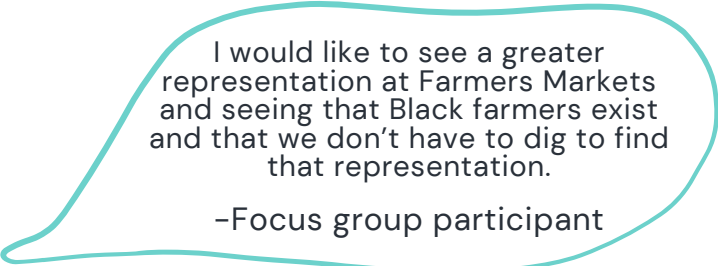
Anti-racist ideas and practices aim to challenge and ultimately end systemic racism. "Anti-racism is the active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably." - NAC International Perspectives: Women and Global Solidarity (Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre).

## **Being Anti-Racist is different than being "not-racist".**

Being anti-racist means you are actively working towards anti-racism and consciously aware of systematic inequalities that exist and would like to change that for the better. A common response to seeing racism and sometimes being implicated in racism is to say "But I'm not racist". While this is important to assert, it is not enough. To be just 'not racist' in a society and community where racism is endemic and exists at both the individual and structural levels, means racism can continue to inform our social structures unabated. Sometimes racism can be hard to see if you are not looking for it.

Our markets are dynamic and bustling places that are actively creating an alternative food model within the industrial food system. We are building community, human connection, and fostering economic livelihood. This is pretty amazing stuff! But when we look at our markets through a food justice or an anti-racist lens, we can see who is not there and who is being excluded. It is our responsibility to act on these observations. If we wish for our Farmers Market communities to be equitable and inviting for all, our work as people in positions of power requires us to be anti-racist. It is not enough to be just "not racist". This work requires self-reflection, vulnerability and the willingness to listen. You may make some mistakes along the way, but that is alright. Learn from them and keep moving forward.

## **This work takes work!**



I would like to see a greater representation at Farmers Markets and seeing that Black farmers exist and that we don't have to dig to find that representation.

-Focus group participant

# What is Food Justice?

Food Justice is when communities are exercising their right to grow, sell, and eat healthy food. In more complex terms, it is the dismantling of all forms of oppression that act as a barrier for individuals, families, communities, and nations to participate in a culturally appropriate, healthy, and ecologically sustainable food system (FoodShare, n.d.; Winson, Sumner, Gingras, & Koç, 2016).

Here in Canada, Black and Indigenous people face the most oppression within the food system with elevated rates of food insecurity and the ongoing and lasting effects of settler colonialism. Farmers Markets are a powerful alternative to the industrial food system, but they are also susceptible to upholding injustice rife in the industrial food system. It is critical to the sustainability of Farmers Markets that they create a true alternative to the current food system by ensuring that they are actively working towards Food Justice.

"Farmers Markets are very white spaces, there is something about going into an all white space that makes me feel a bit uneasy. Farmers Markets shouldn't feel like a bourgeoisie white space to purchase food."

- Focus group participant

"For myself who will hopefully be a vendor next year, I feel like I would have more courage to act for mentorship if there was a BIPOC womxn at the market to ask for advice on starting out."

-Focus group participant

Farmers Markets managers should not be defensive regarding racism. It's very exhausting as a BIPOC person.

-Focus group participant



# Running an Anti- Oppressive Market

## Gatekeeping

**Gatekeeping: What is Gatekeeping?/'gāt,kēpiNG/ noun**

The activity of controlling, and usually limiting, general access to something.

Sometimes when governing bodies have been operating the same way for a long period of time it is hard see how their approaches could be problematic. This is particularly true when the majority benefits from the status quo. The following exercises will help market management reflect on decision making practices and give an idea of where you need to improve.

### Question Exercise for your team.

*This exercise is not intended to shame or blame – the goal is to encourage dialogue and thought around the current practices and how they can change and be better.*

- How many of your board members/committees are BIPOC?
- Who are the current “Gatekeepers” at your Market? (for example, if a vendor is to apply for a booth, who makes the final decision and why?)
- Does your Market include BIPOC folks in decision making?
- If so, what are the ratio of BIPOC to not?
- What are your current avenues for recruiting board members/team members?
- Where do you do your outreach, and how might that change to include marginalized communities?
- How do you currently source new farmers?

For Links to further exercises please refer to Further Reading & Resources

It would be nice to have BIPOC representation within management. Having the board as well be diverse is also important. More transparency on what they see the future of the Farmers Markets is important.

-Focus group participant

It's very important to have rotating tables at the Farmers Markets because it increases diversity and exposure. Having more teachable moments at the Farmers Market would be great.

-Focus group participant



# Vendorship

We have established that there is lack of representation of BIPOC vendors at Farmers' Markets. We know that there are some "old school" processes in market spaces like how many vendors are "grandfathered in" ([pssst This term has a racist history!](#)) making it challenging for new and emerging vendors to get their foot in the door and build their businesses. So how do you, the market manager, change these things? These next steps are a good place to start when looking to diversify your vendorship.

## 1 Keep Spots Open

Actively keep booth spaces open every season for BIPOC farmers, particularly emerging farmers or set a goal for your market to work towards having a certain percentage of BIPOC farmers over the next several years. As a manager you have control over who gets to enter your space and you do not need to pander to vendors who have been there for a long time.

## 2 Provide Materials

The start up costs of successfully vending at a market have been identified as a barrier to participating. Particularly tents and tables. Consider keeping a couple tents and tables on hand for new vendors to borrow or rent at a low cost. Build this into your market budget.

## 3 Where are you Looking?

Consider where you are looking to find new vendors. If you are only waiting for vendors to come to you, or looking at other Farmers Markets in your area it is very likely it is a bit of an echo chamber since many farmers markets have overlap. Do your research, expand your horizons and reach out to new farmers.

## 4 Be Transparent & Flexible

Provide flexible payment plans for new farmers and maintain transparency on where vendors fees are going. This is important for all vendors but particularly vendors who may not be used to the structure of farmers markets. Consider creating alternative payment plans like pay as you go or a profit share model for the first year of vendorship. Additionally, provide more flexibility in scheduling. Biweekly or monthly booth space are a great option. Although consistency helps with scheduling, there is usually room for compromise so everyone benefits.

## 5 Question Your Motives

Ask yourself some tough questions. Are you making decisions from a place to make your life easier? Are you making decisions to please the "masses"? Are you fearful of upsetting vendors who have been at your market for a long time? Going against the status quo is not easy especially if you are someone who has benefited from the status quo. But if you are maintaining it, are you serving your community the best you can? But as the saying goes, change is uncomfortable, sit in that discomfort and learn from it. Move forward.

## SUGGESTED ACTION ITEMS

1. Develop/utilize a matrix for your team for decision making. A great example is the Matrix 360 CARE Model (see page 9 for link to this resource)
2. Make a list of actionable goals for your Market's upcoming season. Examples could be:
  - Support a new BIPOC farmer with a tent, table, and booth fees for the season
  - Seek additional funding to support the incubation of BIPOC-led food businesses
3. Research and develop a comprehensive list of BIPOC-led and owned farms, businesses and programs to reach out to and invite to vend at the Market on an ongoing basis, and use as a first point of reference if a space becomes available
4. Acquire consultants and advisors to review policies and practices around equity in your Market
5. Actively support, engage, and promote BIPOC businesses and initiatives through your networks (ie. social media)
6. Develop messaging to include on your website, signage, etc. about diversity and inclusion, 'rules to play' for customers (ie. zero tolerance policy)
7. Wear your "Equity in Farmers Market" pin proudly! Engage customers, vendors, and the community in these important conversations in your every day life, and especially at the Market!

"Having a target of how many BIPOC farmers there should be, this will hold the market managers accountable. Have those farmers be a part of the board (market management) Partner with some diversity focused organizations for guidance."

-Focus group participant

"Capitol is big barrier to get started...It would be nice if there were reduced fees to encourage new BIPOC farmers to participate"

-Focus group participant

# References & Further Reading

## References

*Anti-racism defined.* (n.d.). Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre. Retrieved July 1, 2020, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20201101022553/http://www.aclrc.com/antiracism-defined>

FoodShare. (n.d.). *Food Justice*. Retrieved from: <https://foodshare.net/about/food-justice/>

Winson, A., Sumner, J., Gingras, J. R., & Koç, M. (2016). *Critical perspectives in food studies (Second ed.)* Oxford University Press.

## Resources

[What is Food Justice?](#) – Food Print

[Anti-Racism Work Archives](#) – Farmers Market Coalition

[Young Farmers Racial Equity Toolkit](#) – Young Farmers

## Articles & Reports

[Black Farmers' Markets work to "redesign the food system"](#) (Helmer – Carolina Public Press, 2020)

[Black Farmers' Markets grow in North Carolina](#) (Abels – The Counter, 2020)

[Future Farmers: The Challenge of Food Sovereignty for Black Farmers](#) (Igbavboa & Elliot – Ryerson University, 2019)

[The History of Food in Canada Is the History of Colonialism](#) (Mintz – The Walrus, 2020)

[We don't farm because it's Trendy"](#) (Gripper – Environmental Health News, 2020)

[Anti-Racism Principles and Practices](#) by Lisa Fithian from the by RiseUp DAN-LA

[Farming While Black Podcast](#) (Letson – KCRW, 2017)

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## Contact Us!

For feedback or questions regarding this toolkit please use [this form](#). Please know that we are a group of volunteers and response time may vary. Thank you!

