



From left to right: Alyshia Silva, Rowena Garcia, Erik Hazard, and M. Jahi Chappell.

Food First Welcomes New Executive Director

The Food First Board of Trustees and staff are excited to welcome Dr. M. Jahi Chappell as the new Executive Director of Food First. Jahi began his tenure on August 1st, and will lead Food First in its mission to end the root causes of hunger through research, education, and action in support of grassroots movements and frontline communities.

Dr. Joyce King, the President of the Food First Board of Trustees, stated, “At this moment in history, when activists and academics involved in food justice movements all over the world are challenged to find resources to support our work in solidarity with front-line communities engaged in the struggle to end hunger, the Board of Trustees at Food First is excited to welcome Dr. Jahi Chappell as our new Executive Director. Jahi brings an impressive blend of analysis and action to Food First. His global expertise in agroecology, rigorous scholarship and on-the-ground engagement with farmers, social movements and alliances align well with Food First’s mission. Like Jahi, board members are also engaged with diverse communities across the US, Africa, the Global South, and food security research and policies. We eagerly embrace Jahi’s commitment to continuing Food First’s thinking and doing tradition of systemic analysis and strategic direct action for food sovereignty.”

Jahi is a political agroecologist, an activist, and a scholar of food justice and food sovereignty. He holds a PhD in ecology and evolutionary biology. He comes to us from Coventry University in the United Kingdom where he has served as Associate Professor of Agroecology and Agriculture Policy for the past three years. With 15 years of experience in leadership positions in the non-profit sector and academia, Jahi has worked with local communities, social movements, and universities around the world. Driven by a commitment to solidarity with grassroots groups and frontline communities, he has dedicated his life to challenging structural and institutional violence and oppression against black and indigenous communities, people of color, and women.

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Food First is a “peoples’ think tank” and education-for-action center. Our work highlights the root causes and solutions to hunger and poverty, with a commitment to fighting racism and establishing food as a fundamental human right.

Food First’s retiring Executive Director, Eric Holt-Giménez, said, “From informing the public to amplifying the voices of frontline communities, over the years Food First has moved steadily from being the nation’s primary food think tank, to becoming a movement-driven “think-and-do tank.” With Jahi Chappell as our new executive director, the Institute for Food and Development Policy joins the wave of new leadership mobilizing communities around the world for food, farm, and climate justice. The timing couldn’t be better!”

Jahi said about his new position, “In these challenging times, we need more than ever hope that does not deceive us, and critique that does not paralyze us. For over 40 years, Food First has been one of the foremost organizations providing rigorous evidence for hope, and critical action and analysis for change. I look forward to continuing Food First’s work in supporting the struggles of the food system’s many protagonists for a food sovereign, agroecological world, where food is produced, distributed, and eaten in the spirit of joy, dignity, and respect. It is an immense privilege to be able to build on the trust and respect Food First has earned over the years through the incredible work of its staff and trustees; particularly a mentor and friend like Eric Holt-Giménez. It is not every day one gets to stand on the shoulders of such giants.”

The Food First Board and staff are eager to begin this new chapter for Food First with Jahi as the Executive Director, and look forward to continuing our mission of ending the injustices that cause hunger.

Food First Fellow Jun Borrás on the Possibilities of Left- Wing Populism

Dr. Saturnino “Jun” Borrás, professor at the International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague and Food First Fellow, recently published an article on the radical political possibilities of a progressive agrarian populist movement. In “Agrarian social movements: The absurdly difficult but not impossible agenda of defeating right-wing populism

and exploring a socialist future,” Borrás compares progressive agrarian populism and right-wing populism, arguing that the current moment is ripe for the emergence of an anti-capitalist, populist agrarian movement.

Borrás shows how populism on both the political right and left has emerged as a reaction to the current crisis of neoliberal capitalism. Particularly in rural areas, increased inequalities and frustrations for rural populations have allowed right-wing movements to find a sizable base of voters looking for an alternative to the current system. Rather than cede that space to the right, Borrás believes the anti-capitalist left can successfully rally these same populations.

The article concludes with both warnings and instructions for the left: outlining mistakes to avoid when countering right-wing movements, how to be both class conscious and inclusive of race and feminist politics, and the key elements of a revolutionary movement. Urging us away from centrism and towards political “audacity,” Borrás advocates for a reclamation of populism for the left in order to move towards an equitable and egalitarian future.

Food Firsts Hosts “Organizing for Farmworker Justice” Webinar Panel

The number of farmworkers on a temporary guest worker program visa (H-2A) in Washington has been rapidly rising. A lack of safe, non-exploitative agricultural jobs has created the illusion of a labor shortage, allowing big farms to take advantage of a seasonal, H-2A labor force. There is little transparency surrounding the application process, documentation, labor conditions, and placement of H-2A workers. The H-2A program has weak labor protections and oversight, leading to significant labor abuses of farmworkers. In response to the injustices of the H-2A program, farmworker organizers joined with Community 2 Community (C2C) to push for SB 5438, a bill put forward by the Washington Employment Security Department. They won major protections for H-2A workers.



Members of Familias Unidas por la Justicia and Community 2 Community in Bellingham, Washington. *Photo courtesy of Edgar Franks.*

To celebrate this win and learn how C2C organized to protect farmworkers, Nezahualcoyotl Xiuhtecutli, Research Coordinator at the Florida Association of Farmworkers, and Alyshia Silva, Director of Development at Food First, hosted a panel with C2C's Edgar Franks and Maureen Darras. Both Franks and Darras worked with farmworker unions like Familias Unidas por la Justicia to bring workers to the capitol to testify about labor conditions and pressure legislators to pass the bill. The bill increases staffing and funding to carry out field checks and visits, reducing the need for farmworkers to self-report labor violations. It also creates an advisory committee tasked with analyzing the state of the H-2A program in Washington. During the panel, we learned just how vital farmworker organizing was to the legislative process.

However, Darras emphasized that there is more work to be done. "This bill is not a catch-all solution for the H-2A program," she said during the panel, also noting that "farmworker justice is immigrant justice." The panel was an excellent educational opportunity, where Darras and Franks showed the connections between exploitative labor systems, like the H-2A guestworker program, industrial agriculture, and border militarization. SB 5438 is an important win for farmworker protections, but, as pointed out at the end of the panel, more work is needed on pushing for alternatives to industrial agriculture and immigration reform

so we can fight the issue of farmworker exploitation at its root. The panel left us feeling well-informed and energized.

Working Towards Farm Justice with Parity and Supply Management

What would it look like to actually work toward the changes to the food system highlighted in the Green New Deal? Parity and supply management are two specific policies that can help get us there. That is why Food First recently wrote two articles on how these policies could help address today's food, farm, and climate crises.

In *What is Parity? (And Why You Should Care)*, we break down why parity is fundamental to changing our food system. Parity is the notion that family farmers should be paid a fair price for their



A pile of milo near a grain elevator in Grainfield, Kansas. *Photo by C.K. Hartman (CC BY 2.0).*

product—one that covers their costs and provides them with a decent livelihood. Without parity we can't control overproduction, one of the main drivers of agricultural greenhouse gas emissions, agricultural pollution, food waste, family farm bankruptcies, hunger, malnutrition and diet-related disease.

Parity policies would stop the low-price/overproduction cycle that wastes resources, pollutes the environment and sends farmers into debt. They would also save taxpayers the money spent on farm subsidies.

In *Trade war with China: The Crisis (and the Solution) Behind the Hype*, we go beyond the mainstream news coverage of the trade war and explore how supply management as a policy and solution to the crisis would help stabilize farm livelihoods. While the US has accelerated its trade war with China, it has stressed many farmers who are dependent on exporting various agricultural products. Though some farmers of crops like garlic are benefiting, overall, farm incomes have declined in the Midwest and Southern states and for some specialty crop farmers on the West Coast. While the media continues to talk loudly about the trade war, they are not discussing why our farmers are so dependent on exports in the first place. They are failing to discuss why we need supply management.

Many farmers are interested in supply management policies that would protect them in an uncertain agricultural economy. This would include policies like a floor price for commodities, a commodity reserve to draw from in poor harvest years, and conservation programs that take farm land out of production. Together, these policies could control overproduction, stabilize prices for farmers, and still ensure that demand for food by consumers is met despite seasonal fluctuations.

Food First Explores Food Sovereignty and Utopia

Early this summer, we explored the idea of food sovereignty as a part of a utopian proposal for the future. Several Food First contributors were on a panel at the fifth

[annual conference](#) of the [World-Ecology Research Network](#) (WERN), “Planetary Utopias, Capitalist Dystopias: Justice, Nature, and the Liberation of Life.” Hosted at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco, this conference explored “the tension between the historical limits of the possible and the ‘impossible’ projects of planetary justice” (WERN website). Food First Fellow [Annie Shattuck](#) introduced the panel, explaining that our current food system is downright dystopian, and acts as “a spearhead of global capitalism,” opening up new frontiers for capital accumulation and ravaging the planet. Perhaps food sovereignty isn’t fully realized today, but any progress toward such a utopia, while still embedded in capitalism, will have contradictions. Referencing Erik Olin-Wright, she reminded us that there is no single way forward to realizing a utopia.

[Maywa Montenegro](#), a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at University of California, Davis told the story of the [Open Source Seed Initiative](#) (OSSI), a project that works to bring back control of seeds to communities and farmers. [Antonio Roman-Alcalá](#), a PhD student at the International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, Netherlands, emphasized that our fight for food sovereignty and justice must use tactics “that correspond to the world we want to live in.” As an example, Antonio referenced *Freedom Farmers* written by [Monica White](#) (also a Food First Fellow), which tells of collective agency and community resilience among black farmers in the south.



Top left: Maywa Montenegro; Top right: Annie Shattuck; Bottom left: Eric Holt-Giménez; Bottom right: Antonio Roman-Alcalá

Lastly, Food First’s Eric Holt-Giménez spoke about his experiences with Nicaraguan farmers who had been bankrupted by the green revolution in agriculture, and were working to create their own food sovereign communities. Occurring during the larger Sandinista revolution, this farmer-to-farmer movement fit into the context of breaking from the status quo and shifting to a more utopian world.

In the US today, without a universalizing vision, we have a multitude of small utopian projects fragmented across the landscape. The Green New Deal could be the platform that finally develops political will and cohesion among these movements. Eric left us with the thought that “utopias are what lead us from wrong thinking and lead us to much more clarity about the solutions at hand.”

Why Did You Receive These Publications?

This publication was sent to you because of your generous support of Food First in the past. Created in collaboration with farmers, organizers, and researchers, these publications are a piece of how we share and envision our strategies and solutions for a just food system. We hope you consider renewing your membership with Food First to continue supporting justice-centered research and analysis for all. This work is only possible because of you.

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