

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE &  
FOOD SYSTEMS FUNDERS



**Collective Action in the Food Industry**

*Sponsored by Oxfam America*

How do you build trust among people and institutions that historically have been at odds? How do you change the game when no single actor can do it by themselves? This workshop will examine these questions through a case study: the Equitable Food Initiative (EFI). The EFI has created new standards for production of fruits and vegetables that ensure a dignified livelihood for farmworkers, a more stable and professionally trained workforce for growers, and safer and more environmentally sustainable food for consumers and food purchasers. Reducing risk and catalyzing productivity can make the system pay for itself, but it is the collective action and trust-building—not a straightline process—that is integral to success. The EFI is co-chaired by United Farm Workers of America and Oxfam America. Other members of the EFI steering Committee include four organizations representing farmworkers (Farm Labor Organizing Committee, Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, National Farm Worker Ministry, and Farmworker Justice), food safety and pesticide NGOs (Consumers Federation of America, Center for Science in the Public Interest, and Pesticide Action Network), as well as Andrews & Williamson, a major berry grower, and Costco.

**Moderator**

**Minor Sinclair**, *regional director, Oxfam America, MA*

**Speakers**

**Maisie Greenwalt**, *vice president of strategy, Bon Appétit Management Company, CA*

**Caroline Smith DeWaal**, *director, Food Safety Program, Center for Science in the Public Interest, DC*

**Baldemar Velásquez**, *president and founder, Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), OH*

**Caroline Smith DeWaal**

- Regulatory systems that seem obvious take too long so new tools are needed
- They have been watching the data since well before the 2006 spinach outbreak
- Spinach *e. coli* outbreak was a loss for everyone, citizens who lost family members, business (the industry has never recovered) and the government lost tax
- Produce isn't washed so it is a big risk
- Previous on farm regulations have been voluntary and have not been fully complied with
- Lobbying happened as part of FSMA and was multiparty – retailers, people consuming produce, Pesticide Action Network

**Maisie Greenwalt**

- Knowing their suppliers is a key goal of Bon Appetit

- However, most purchases happen from warehouses which are disconnected
- People are profiting off of anonymity
- They care about issues such as environmental stewardship and labor relations but have had no way to ensure

### Baldemar Velásquez

- TedX Fruitvale brought farm issues
- Worked together to identify problems before identifying the solutions
- Protections are afforded but there are exemptions to labor relations action
- Is the law enough? Bathrooms without stalls are legal

### Discussion Themes

- Recognition of various parties' needs
  - o Retailers want to know their suppliers but current systems make that challenging
  - o Farmworkers need better protection under the law
  - o Policy workers and advocates want to educate the public and policy makers
  - o There is a need to balance food safety and sustainable agriculture
- *What is EFI?*
  - o It is a certification, it is about bringing value and transparency
  - o Labels will eventually be available for the consumer in 3-5 years
  - o Training courses for the farm workers that empowers them to report on what is happening on the farm
    - Mediation skills
    - Active listening
    - Management skills
    - Creates diverse leadership
  - o Standard holder
  - o Outside auditors
- *Is there a price premium associated with sourcing from these types of farms?*
  - o No, it never came up
  - o Contracts have a huge value for the growers so they do not expect a price premium
  - o Consistency is more important than a premium and allows them to make investments into specific crops
- *Who is on board?*
  - o Costco, Bon Appetit are committed
  - o Letters were sent to the 25 largest buyers
  - o Discussions have been had with 17 of the 25
  - o Others have visited farms
- Concerns from the audience
  - o What will this cost or require? We live in a time where we are looking for fewer certifications.

- How can co-ops and smaller growers be included? What will the effect be on smaller producers?
- When there is a focus on product vs. the farm, larger farms will trump smaller farms and use the program to gain marketshare
- Progress will be published so that the industry can respond, transparency is key
- There is a belief in working within the current system to create change is still a powerful leverage point