INTRODUCTION

Dear Friends,

If I had just one word to characterize my feelings about the work of Food Empowerment Project (F.E.P.) in 2021, it would be gratifying. Gratitude for all that we accomplished. Gratitude for F.E.P.’s remarkable staff, board members, and volunteers. But most of all, gratitude for the unwavering contributions of our many supporters. You might not realize it, but the struggle for food justice is a collaborative effort, and you are an indispensable part of that struggle. Your dedication to fighting for the rights of both human and non-human animals continued to inspire me throughout another unpredictable year, and I am deeply grateful for your support.

We at F.E.P. are very proud to present this report highlighting our work for 2021. These pages cover our biggest successes in our four main areas of work: encouraging people to stop eating animals, spotlighting the unavailability of healthy foods in Black and Brown communities, advocating for veganism, and/or those who are ‘vegan-curious’ about Lao food. 

Of course, we also experienced a year of challenges, especially in light of the ongoing pandemic. COVID-19 inspired us to get creative, and we managed to make events like our Vallejo Healthy Food Fest and Fight for the Ocean Day virtual while also taking extra precautions during our School Drive for the children of farm workers.

One of the projects I am most excited about is F.E.P.’s continued development of culinary resources. In 2021 we created VeganLaoFood.com to accompany VeganMexicanFood.com and VeganFilipinoFood.com. It is so rewarding not only to see others with the same interests that children’s foods and questions about the different forms of child labor—including slavery—in the chocolate industry.

F.E.P.’s mission is to create a more just and sustainable world by helping people recognize the power of their food choices, and in 2021, 69.4% of our budget went toward programs that actively reflect this commitment. We could not do any of this work without your generous support. As you read the following pages, I hope you will remember that it is your commitment to advocating veganism, to supporting food access in Black and Brown communities, to standing up for the farm workers who grow and pick our food, and to educating consumers about ethical chocolate that inspires us to keep fighting the good fight. Thank you!

With much appreciation,

Suzy Gonzalez
Suzy Gonzalez
Founder

PHOTO CREDIT: DARRYL JAMES PHOTOGRAPHY

2021 YEAR IN REVIEW

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

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Note: F.E.P. is a small and quickly growing non-profit organization, so it’s crucial for us to maintain financial stability to ensure that our work can continue consistently. Therefore, we allocate money for the upcoming year’s budget and beyond. Thank you for supporting us.

In addition, there is a fun video about Food Empowerment Project that I hope you’ll check out if you haven’t already. It was produced by Sury Gonzalez of the women of color/ trans folks of color gender non-conforming collective Veggie Mixx and features yours truly as an animated puppet; the video can be viewed on their Instagram at @baltimoreveggie. And I was honored to be listed among the “15 Notable Alumna of Saint Edwards University” in Austin.

NEW ADS

Speaking of our culinary websites and booklets, in 2021 we ran advertisements for Vegan Filipino Food and Vegan Mexican Food, both of which were inspired by our commitment to provide vegan resources that reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of our community. We promoted Vegan Filipino Food to the Filipinos community with a half-page, full-color ad (in English and Tagalog) in two newspapers for Filipinos living in the United States: Filipino Star and Asian Journal.

For Latin Heritage Month (celebrated from September 15 to October 15), F.E.P. ran ads for our wildly popular Vegan Mexican Food recipe booklets in two Spanish-language newspapers: the Ahydration El Observador and La Opinion in Los Angeles. Traffic to our VeganMexicanFood.com site subsequently increased by more than 300%. In fact, El Observador continued to run our ad on their homepage at no cost because they support our mission. Thanks to Meneka of Nooch Design Co. for creating such a powerful ad!

32
3

2021 YEAR IN REVIEW

FIGHT FOR THE OCEAN

In 2021 into a weeklong event—August 23–30—with virtual activities. This issue-based series attracted robust audience within the vegan food justice community, garnering more than 2,000 views. Recordings also remain available on our YouTube by visiting https://bit.ly/FIGHT2021.

Among the highlights of the week, we had cooking demos from one of our most popular annual events, created to generate enthusiasm and a demand for change. It’s an opportunity to share the message that healthy food is not only delicious but should be a shared focus of everyone in Vallejo. California. As we did in 2020, we made 2021’s VHFF a virtual event to keep everyone safe. That also meant it wasn’t limited to people in or near Vallejo. We spread out the sixth-annual VHFF over two weekends—September 12 and 19—and brought a blend of education and entertainment to dozens of households.

Week 1 featured a cooking demo, cookbook giveaways, a tour of Vallejo People’s Garden, a guide to eating vegan in Vallejo, a colorful dance performance by Ballet Folklorico Quetzaltz, a discussion about access to healthy foods with Helen Marie “Cookie” Gordon, and a tribute to Maria Guiroa (1975–2020), who set the stage for F.E.P.’s work in Vallejo as our first community organizer. Week 2 included a fun Baja-inspired demonstration, two more cooking demos, healthy living tips, and a wrap-up with our team. Both days are available as online videos in English and with Spanish subtitles at http://bit.ly/VHFF2021.

Our Vallejo Healthy Food Fest (VHFF) is one of our most popular annual events, created to generate enthusiasm and a demand for change. It’s an opportunity to share the message that healthy food is not only delicious but should be a shared focus of everyone in Vallejo, California. As we did in 2020, we made 2021’s VHFF a virtual event to keep everyone safe. That also meant it wasn’t limited to people in or near Vallejo. We spread out the sixth-annual VHFF over two weekends—September 12 and 19—and brought a blend of education and entertainment to dozens of households.

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After the success of our Vegan Mexican Food and Vegan Filipino Food recipe booklets and websites in previous years, we used social media and our monthly newsletter to call on Lao cooks and chefs to submit recipes for a Vegan Lao Food resource, inspired by the culinary traditions of our board member, Shann Darasombath. The response was so enthusiastic that we launched VeganLaoFood.com in 2021. “Lao dishes are meant to be eaten in community,” said Sharon, “and it is with this website that I hope to create a community for Lao vegans and those who are ‘vegan-curious’ about Lao food.”

As the activity gained momentum, the group Reppin’ Laos shared our video on Lao cooks and chefs to submit recipes for a Vegan Lao Food resource, inspired by the culinary traditions of our board member, Shann Darasombath. The response was so enthusiastic that we launched VeganLaoFood.com in 2021. “Lao dishes are meant to be eaten in community,” said Sharon, “and it is with this website that I hope to create a community for Lao vegans and those who are ‘vegan-curious’ about Lao food.”

The site quickly gained a following: the group Reppin’ Laos shared our video on Lao cooks and chefs to submit recipes for a Vegan Lao Food resource, inspired by the culinary traditions of our board member, Shann Darasombath. The response was so enthusiastic that we launched VeganLaoFood.com in 2021. “Lao dishes are meant to be eaten in community,” said Sharon, “and it is with this website that I hope to create a community for Lao vegans and those who are ‘vegan-curious’ about Lao food.”

To everyone in Vallejo, California. As we did in 2020, we made 2021’s VHFF a virtual event to keep everyone safe. That also meant it wasn’t limited to people in or near Vallejo. We spread out the sixth-annual VHFF over two weekends—September 12 and 19—and brought a blend of education and entertainment to dozens of households.

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FARM WORKER RIGHTS

F.E.P. works to advance the rights of farm workers by supporting corporate, legislative, and regulatory changes and works with farm worker communities to help meet immediate needs.

We are thrilled to report that in 2021 F.E.P. collected and distributed 1,019 backpacks filled with pencil, paper, pens, and other necessities to the children of farm workers.

On July 22, 240 backpacks laden with school supplies were delivered to our longtime partners Movimiento Cultural de la Unión Indígena in Sonoma County. The next batch of 356 backpacks went to a farm worker community in California’s Central Valley on August 2. And then, on August 9, we delivered the remaining 414 backpacks to another large group of farm workers in the Central Valley.

We had already met our goal of 1,000 backpacks when a farmer worker contacted us that we could provide backpacks and supplies for an additional 19 kids. Thanks to your support, we were able to help. Another contact told us how impressed she was with F.E.P.’s understanding of the farm workers’ needs, especially since we were able to give each student a reusable water bottle, which many of the kids were beginning to ask for because schools were shutting off communal drinking fountains as a health safety measure during the COVID-19 pandemic. (It was the first and only year we’ve handed out water bottles, and each was inscribed with an inspirational message to the recipient.) Again, it is due to your generosity that F.E.P. is able to quickly adapt to requests like these. As you may know, farm workers are victims of an unjust system that benefits corporations over workers, often leaving parents and grandparents unable to afford school supplies for their children or grandchildren. Thank you to all of you who helped make 2021’s School Supply Drive such a success!

WINERY OUTREACH

We were honored to join 50 other community members who visited Sonoma County wineries to discuss demands made by farm workers impacted by wildfires in the area. There were teachers, union workers, doctors, and young activists, all gathering to deliver the farm workers’ calls for such basic requirements as clean bathrooms.

This effort was coordinated by North Bay Jobs with Justice, a nonprofit where a member of whose executive committee lauren is on. One of the wineries the group approached, St. Francis Winery, has been on F.E.P.’s recommended list for several years, as they make vegans wine and had good policies on farm workers in the past. We sent a letter to the winery letting them know that we would remove them from our list unless they met the demands of the farm workers—and, unfortunately, we had to do just that.

FOOD DELIVERY

Sadly, farm workers are among the most impacted essential workers during the pandemic, and so F.E.P. sent more than $1,000 worth of food to farm workers in California’s Central Valley, where they were in quarantine due to COVID-19. We are so thankful that—with your generous support—we were able to provide some of the support they needed right away. We thank the farm workers for what they do and thank YOU for donating to this special effort of support.

IN SOLIDARITY WITH INDIAN FARMERS

For most of 2021, hundreds of thousands of farmers and farm workers in India, along with Indian farmers’ organizations and trade unions, demanded the withdrawal of the three agrarian laws the Parliament of India passed in 2020—laws that they say are “anti-farmer” and prioritize corporate interests over their own.

In January, F.E.P. released a statement of solidarity, noting that we see the struggle by farmers and farm workers in India as an inspiration to all those challenging corporate power and exploitation around the world. After observing how similar India is to the United States in its struggle with racism and discrimination, the statement closes with, “We encourage the Indian government to respect the right to protest and assemble and protest without any use of violence or intimidation in any form.” The government finally repealed the laws on December 1.

NEW WEB PAGES

We are constantly adding resources to our website, and in 2021, we created two new pages: the first was “Workers in the Fishing Industry,” which explores the issues surrounding those who toil on fishing boats or in fish processing plants. These workers are subjected to a wide variety of physical and emotional abuse. While it may be tempting for those who advocate for animals to disregard the suffering of these people, it’s important to remember that they too are victims of domination and violence. In other words, while it’s another reason not to eat creatures from the ocean, it’s also a call for compassion for these maltreated workers.

The second new page was “The Buzz About Honey.” Did you know that the honey industry shares several parallels with the dairy industry? For one thing, the honeybee is not native to North America; just like cows, honeybees were brought to the U.S. centuries ago from Europe to serve as agricultural animals. In addition, both the dairy industry and the commercial honey industry are built upon models in which humans ultimately steal the “usefulness”: bee farms have been known to destroy entire colonies, just as cows and calves are considered “expendable” in the dairy industry, so too are bees sometimes killed after they have outlived their “usefulness.”

Invisible Vegan

This effort was coordinated by North Bay Jobs with Justice, a nonprofit where a member of whose executive committee Lauren is on. One of the wineries the group approached, St. Francis Winery, has been on F.E.P.’s recommended list for several years, as they make vegan wine and had good policies on farm workers in the past. We sent a letter to the winery letting them know that we would remove them from our list unless they met the demands of the farm workers—and, unfortunately, we had to do just that.

EAT YOUR ETHICS

Food Empowerment Project is here to help ensure that your values are reflected in your food choices. That’s why we created “Eat Your Ethics: Four Courses of Empowerment,” a series of online events packed with memes of information about veganism to help everyone better understand the realities of animals raised and killed for food, along with other issues of injustice within our food system. F.E.P. presented this as the perfect series to participate in for those new to veganism, those interested in going vegan, or those wanting to learn other ways to help make their eating habits more ethical. The series—which also shared information about a wide variety of nonhuman animals, addressed how colonization has impacted people who are lactose intolerant, discussed why Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities are more likely to be victims of environmental racism, examined the abuse of humans in the chocolate industry, presented ideas on how to shop with care, and much more—launched from March through August.

SCHOOL SUPPLY DRIVE

We are very proud of these informative new resources and hope you will check them out!

ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

PITTSBURG, CALIFORNIA

F.E.P. understands that advocating for veganism means little if consumers don’t have access to fresh fruits and vegetables. So when we invited to survey access to healthy foods in the City of Pittsburg, California, we were eager to get started! In 2021, we began working with a local group, Growing Healthy People for Pittsburg (GHPF), which helped organize the first survey event on July 31. Among the dozen volunteers who went into grocery stores, markets, and other businesses that sell fresh produce was Pittsburg’s vice mayor, Hollard Barrett White. “Partnering with Food Empowerment Project has reinforced, fist me, the importance of plant-based eating and what that can mean for the health of our Pittsburg community,” he said. “As a public official I want to help empower my neighbors and my colleagues throughout the region to embark on this journey to transform our communities towards a healthier way of living. I am tremendously grateful to work with an organization that’s dedicated to racial equity and vegan food justice.”

In addition, we organized a screening of Invisible Vegan in Pittsburg, and about 40 people from the community attended. Not only did they enjoy the vegan snack packs we created, but they were so charged about veganism that they expressed interest in creating a list of restaurants where they can find vegan food!
F.E.P.’s work was featured this year in the following articles and interviews. (Note: This is just a sampling of our media presence in 2021. Please see our website for a more comprehensive list.)

Food Empowerment Project Employs Education to Help Consumers Make Ethical Food Choices
Date: January 16, 2021 | Source: Foodtank

Support These Intersectional Environmental Organizations for Black History Month
Date: February 1, 2021 | Source: Green Matters

How To Make Your Valentine's Day More Sustainable
Date: February 11, 2021 | Source: Worth

5 Shocking Ways Child Labor Is Still Used in Food Production
Date: March 2, 2021 | Source: One Green Planet

15 Vegan Women Activists of Color You Need to Know About
Date: March 4, 2021 | Source: VegNews

What Is Sustainable Food?
Date: March 18, 2021 | Source: Good Housekeeping

Larb Lettuce Wraps
Date: March 29, 2021 | Source: Nourish

Is Your Easter Chocolate Funding Slavery? Investigating the Dark Side of Your Favourite Treat
Date: March 31, 2021 | Source: Green Is the New Black

How to Have a Kind Easter Celebration
Date: April 2, 2021 | Source: The Kind Life

6 Tips for Adopting the Vegan Diet
Date: April 25, 2021 | Source: Salon

Think Outside the Banana. Eat the Peel
Date: May 10, 2021 | Source: New York Times

Radio Host Danny Parkins Raises $660k for Nonprofit Supermarket in 24-Hour Radiothon
Date: June 24, 2021 | Source: Newsweek

Child Slavery Case Against Nestlé Rejected
Date: June 24, 2021 | Source: Organization for World Peace

Veganism Isn’t Just About Saving Animals. It’s About Saving the World
Date: August 4, 2021 | Source: Yahoo! Life

Amid a Global Banana Crisis, Puerto Rico's Abundant Biodiversity Offers a Taste of Hope
Date: August 20, 2021 | Source: The Washington Post

Chocolate Is One of the Most Damaging Foods to the Environment—Here’s Why
Date: November 2, 2021 | Source: Well + Good

ACTIVITIES, EVENTS, AND SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS IN 2021

Here is a selection of 11 out of more than 30 public discussions and appearances that were made throughout 2021.

UC Berkeley Plant Futures Symposium
Tulane Environmental Justice Summit
Lewis & Clark Animal Law Symposium
Farm Sanctuary’s Social Justice & Our Food System
Justice for Animals Program (USF)
New York City Bar Association—Food Justice: Intersections within Civil Rights and Animal Rights panel
UCLA Undergraduate Seminar
Black Vegetarian of Maryland FB Live with Destiny
Supreme Master Three-Part Television Interview
Youth Climate Save Panel
SSD IG live with Afro-Vegan Society

Food Empowerment Project’s vision of a more just and sustainable future includes animals, people, and ecosystems—and we need to build shared understanding to get there. Our leadership tirelessly draws the connections between these and other aspects of vegan food justice in talks, interviews, and panels in order to educate and engage our communities from coast to coast.

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HELP US IN THE FIGHT TO BRING FOOD JUSTICE TO ALL

By recognizing and making informed food choices, we can prevent injustices against people, the environment, and animals. Your support will help Food Empowerment Project get one step closer to a more just and sustainable world.

DONATE TODAY

www.foodispower.org/give

We appreciate your support of our programs. We are a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit, and all donations are tax deductible.