

Year in Review

2023



INTRODUCTION

Dear Friends,

In 2023, Food Empowerment Project (F.E.P.) celebrated another milestone: our sweet 16th birthday! That's 16 years of vegan advocacy for the animals; 16 years of calling for farm worker justice; 16 years of pushing for food access in Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities; and 16 years of informing consumers about slavery and child labor in the chocolate industry.

Ever since F.E.P. was founded in 2007, it has been our mission to connect the various systems of oppression and expose how they affect human and non-human animals. Among the many highlights you will read about in the following pages are F.E.P.'s efforts in the youth advocacy space, our anti-dairy campaign, our latest vegan cuisine resource, our updated "Eating Vegan on a Budget" page, another successful School Supply Drive for the children of farm workers, new issue pages added to our website, the growth of our Chocolate List, the return of our popular online food show, and F.E.P. standing in solidarity with Amy's Kitchen workers.

We are immensely proud of our work, and we are equally proud that you share with us a vision of a world in which no one, regardless of their species, is exploited. In 2023, we used more of our budget to invest in our team's leadership and management training, which allows us to be better equipped for the changes we will strive toward in 2024! As you read about a year of successes, please remember that none of these would be possible without the commitment of supporters like you.

With much appreciation,

The Food Empowerment Project team



Food Empowerment Project Team:

(From Left to Right)

jaz boler, Lee Gitter, Jordan Halliday, Kennedy Little, lauren Ornelas, Alejandra Tolley

FISCAL SUMMARY

SPENDING

PROGRAMS

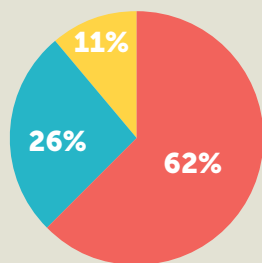
\$484,986

G&A

\$204,860

FUNDRAISING

\$89,260



INCOME

GRANTS

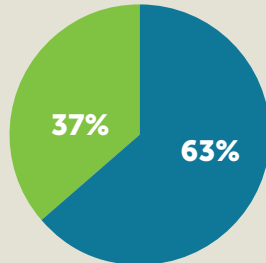
\$393,360

DONATIONS

\$224,199

TOTAL

\$617,559



Note: In 2023, F.E.P. invested more funds in leadership training and forms of professional development for our team to prepare us to transition to a collective model, a long-term goal of our organization. In addition, we received a grant to help us with this shift.

F.E.P. is a small 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.

Cover Image Credits:

- Ann from Edgard's Mission
- School Supply Drive from Food Empowerment Project
- Coconut from Food Empowerment Project

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023

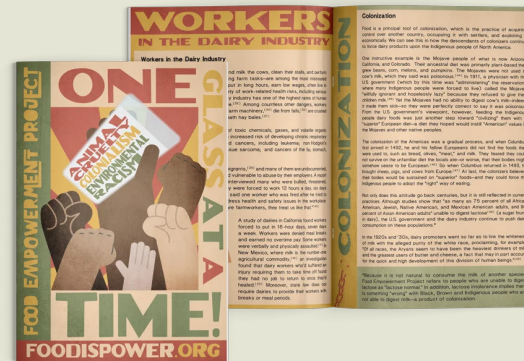


VEGANISM

Anti-Dairy Campaign

In 2023, the second phase of F.E.P.'s anti-dairy campaign—which began in 2022 with the release of our eight-page anti-dairy booklet, *One Glass at a Time*, and a billboard in Madison, Wisconsin, with the message "Got Colonization?"—included advertisement postings in local newspapers. For example, we placed a full-page "Got Colonization?" ad (a play on the dairy industry's *Got Milk?* slogan) in the Tennessee newsweekly *Nashville Scene*, where it ran the week of October 1, 2023, in advance of Indigenous Peoples' Day (October 9) and was seen by tens of thousands of readers. Nashville is a progressive town, and we knew our message would really resonate with the locals. And our choice of Wisconsin for the billboard reflects the state's ranking as the number-two dairy producer in the country.

On the heels of these activities, the billboard was viewed by tens of thousands of individuals weekly, and an equal number of people saw our bold, powerful print ad. Meanwhile, visits to F.E.P.'s *GotColonization.com* site increased by more than 300%—and was overloaded with requests for the free educational pamphlet titled *One Glass at a Time*, a tool which highlights the effects of the dairy industry on animals, human health, the environment, and its legacy of colonization and asks readers to stop consuming dairy. The initial stock of 5,000 pamphlets available for distribution had to be replenished with an additional printing due to exceptional demand.



Vegan Chinese Food

We hired an energetic and creative vegan programs team member, jaz boler, who was instrumental in launching another culinary reference, *VeganChineseFood.com*, which was inspired by Chinese board member Jessian Choy. The resource went live in September 2023 (and was later printed as a full-color recipe guide in March 2024). The website features such delicious and comforting recipes as Spring Rolls, Chinese Potato Gnocchi, Lantern Festival Sticky Pounded Rice Dumplings with Osmanthus Flowers, Vegan "Beef" Curry Puffs, Yunnan Scrambled Eggs with Jasmine Buds, and Mid-Autumn Festival Gansu Province Mooncake with Red Yeast Rice and Rose. We received some nice coverage in *VegNews* when the site went live.

The site features a beautiful VCF logo created by graphic designer Weiyena Wei, who explains that the design incorporates multiple symbols inspired by Chinese traditional folk art and mythology. "The abstract shape of loong (dragon) is one of the most iconic symbols of China and is also a legendary creature in Chinese mythology," she says. "Meanwhile, a simplified cloud shape is inspired by Chinese lucky clouds from ancient sculpture, which has a meaning that's associated with good luck. With a strong influence from Forbidden City ancient buildings, the color palette blends a bold yellow with a soothing cream and vivid red, creating a combination between traditional and modern visual style."

Like our other recipe guides, *VeganChineseFood.com* demonstrates that people can enjoy their favorite comfort foods without consuming animals and without compromising their culture.



VEGAN CHINESE FOOD

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023

Chopped with a Vegan Twist

F.E.P. hosted our second *Chopped with a Vegan Twist* in October. The online cooking show featured three talented chefs—Shruti Boddu, Alicia Casas, and Annie Wang—who created mouthwatering desserts based on four mystery ingredients: chocolate, popcorn, beets, and aquafaba. Attendees voted on their favorites in three categories: Shruti's beetroot cake won for Best Plating, Annie's classic brownie was named Best Ingredient Transformation, and Alicia's cortadillo red velvet cake was chosen as the Overall Favorite.

Attendees also learned baking tips from each chef; Alejandra Tolley, F.E.P.'s communications team member, explained why our Chocolate List is not guided by certifications such as Fair Trade; and jaz taste-tested each dessert, naming Shruti's as her favorite.

lauren Ornelas, F.E.P.'s founder and general programs team member, shared the mission of the event, saying how cooking shows that feature animal ingredients can be difficult for vegans to enjoy. "For us," she said, "it's not just about a cooking show or a baking show—it's about the suffering of non-human animals." So, she explained, F.E.P. wanted to create a show where all of the ingredients are plant-based.



Youth Advocacy

In 2023, we hired a youth advocacy intern, Kennedy Little, who became a part-time team member later in the year. In her new role, Kennedy, who is attending Morehead State University in Kentucky, has been advocating for youth inclusion and education, working with our board of directors, and researching and implementing successful outreach techniques. Among the initiatives she created and led during the year is F.E.P.'s Youth Scholarship Contest, which gave creative youths aged 11 to 24 the opportunity to share their passion for compassion using their writing or illustrating talent to advocate for veganism and help create a kinder world. This competition is a chance for young people to share their talent and convey their ideas about food justice and liberation for all. The scholarship for first place is \$500, and the scholarship for second place is \$300.

Kennedy began hosting a series of videos on Instagram and TikTok called "Veganism: Let's Talk About It!," which she created for young people to understand the meaning of veganism and how they too can align their compassion toward all living beings with their actions. It also addresses how unsustainability contributes to climate change, food injustice, and the exploitation of living beings.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023

Vegan Resources

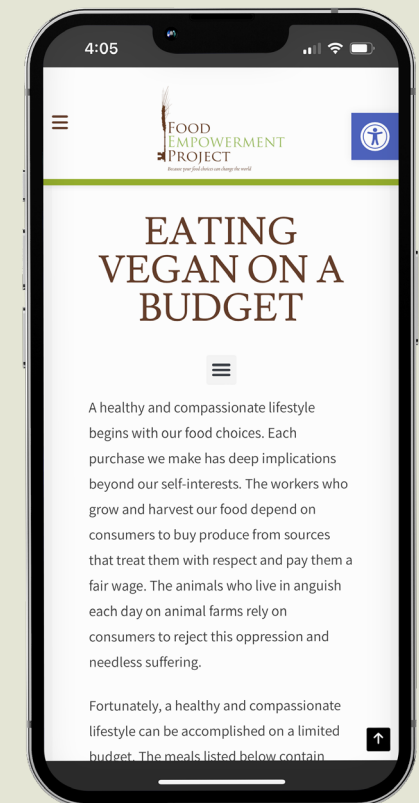
F.E.P. works to promote ethical veganism through education and outreach and also by providing tools to help people go—and stay—vegan. Throughout 2023, we spotlighted resources for vegans and the vegan-curious in each of our monthly newsletters, which are emailed to nearly 5,000 supporters. Resources highlighted during the year included our "Veganism" page, which covers everything from reasons to go vegan to how to find vegan foods and eating on a budget; our "How to Do a Vegan Ice Cream Giveaway!" page (for National Ice Cream Day), which includes a list of instructions covering what you'll need, what types of vegan ice creams to give away, how to approach people, and when and where to host your event; as well as spotlighting the exploitation of animals for food, such as sheep and goats, cows raised for milk, hens raised for eggs (for Easter), honeybees (for World Bee Day), fishes (for World Ocean Month), rabbits (for International Rabbit Day), and pigs (for the winter holidays). In November, the vegan resource included our page on turkeys, which points out that approximately 46 million of these animals are slaughtered for Thanksgiving every year and that, like humans, turkeys have distinct, individual personalities, and our choices at the dinner table determine their fate.



Eating Vegan On A Budget

Despite the claim that eating vegan is economical, we know that shopping for healthy food can be expensive. We also know that if consumers plan well and shop smart—keeping clear of "meat" substitutes and convenience foods, for example—a vegan diet can be more affordable than a diet based on animal products. So, in 2023, jaz completely updated our "Eating Vegan on a Budget" website page. This resource is loaded with advice on how to enjoy a healthy and compassionate lifestyle on a limited budget, and it covers everything from farmer's markets and buying in bulk to kitchen staples and the importance of whole foods.

F.E.P. acknowledges that even having a budget for and access to certain food items is a form of privilege as many do not have that ability. In accordance with our mission, we are committed to advocating for equitable access to healthy foods for all so that everyone can make healthy food choices regardless of budget.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023

New Issue Pages

F.E.P. works hard to provide resources for vegans and the veg-curious alike, and we're proud to feature thoroughly researched pages on scores of ethical-eating topics. One of our new pages focused on coconuts—a ubiquitous and popular ingredient F.E.P. is often asked about. Unfortunately, as with other products in high demand, such as bananas and avocados, coconuts often arrive in the consumer's hands with a troubling history. "Coconut Controversy: The Heartbreaking Truth Behind Your Coconut Products" addresses many of these issues, including the cruel practice of using monkeys to harvest the fruit. Also exposed is the way some farmers supplement their income and improve access to coconut trees: by raising cows and buffaloes for "meat" and dairy.

New pages for 2023 also included "Steeped in Injustice: A Look at Tea," which explores the second most widely consumed drink in the world, surpassed only by water. Tea is surrounded by several social justice issues, from unethical labor practices to the impact the crop's production can have on the environment.

As with all our food-issue pages, both "Coconut Controversy" and "Steeped in Injustice" feature recommendations on consuming these products while remaining true to your ethics. Meanwhile, two of our other issue pages—"The Problem with Avocados" and "The Buzz About Honey"—received media attention in 2023, being referred to in online articles by MSN and The Daily Meal, respectively.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023

New Recipes

To help people go and stay vegan, F.E.P. is constantly adding recipes to our website. In 2023, recipe additions included Vegan Pesto, Tofu Bites, Vegan "Fish" Tacos, Chickpea Noodle Soup, Vegan Pesto, Chocolate Mousse, Vegan Chili, Balsamic Vinaigrette Kale Chips, Breakfast Toast, Granola, and several recipes for the fall and winter holidays: Rosemary Butternut Squash Soup, Pumpkin Cheesecake, Vegan Eggnog, and Peppermint Bark. All these recipes were created by jaz, and they are posted on our website at foodispower.org/recipes-meals.



Amy's Kitchen Boycott

The boycott of Bay Area-based food company Amy's Kitchen called by their workers in 2022 and supported by F.E.P. continued throughout 2023 (although it ended in 2024). Workers were demanding safer working conditions, better pay, and improved health care. Many also reported being victims of workplace discrimination and harassment from managers. We created a variety of initiatives in solidarity with these workers:

- We encouraged our supporters to ask their co-op grocery stores to join the boycott by pulling Amy's Kitchen products from their shelves. And many stores did just that!
- We produced a Boycott Amy's Kitchen sticker with a QR code linking to more information. We encouraged supporters to put stickers on water bottles, laptops, books, etc. More than 300 people ordered these free stickers.
- We revised our Amy's Kitchen page to have more calls to action, including ordering stickers, messaging templates, and an updated petition.
- We created a video to support the more than 300 workers Amy's Kitchen laid off at their factory in San José, California. The video underscores the injustice that these hard-working people suffered.

The way Amy's Kitchen treated its workers is an example of why F.E.P. often says that just because something is vegan that doesn't always mean it's cruelty-free!



HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023

FARM WORKERS

50-Mile Rule

When we helped temporarily remove California’s “50-mile regulation” in 2018, we understood that this requirement that farm workers leave their state-subsidized housing and move at least 50 miles away after the harvest season would come up for re-evaluation in 2024—even though it drastically impacted the education of farm worker children, who were forced to change schools. In preparation for getting the rule banned permanently, lauren moderated a panel on this issue in Sacramento that included farm worker rights activists, a former high school student who was impacted by the 50-mile rule regulation, and a Housing and Community Development official. The panel followed a screening of the documentary *Como Vivimos* (“How We Live”), which addresses how students are impacted by the 50-mile regulation. It’s just another way F.E.P. shows up for farm workers!



Photo Credit: America ReFramed | *Como Vivimos* (How We Live) | Season 12 | Episode 6 | PBS

School Supply Drive

F.E.P. hosted another successful School Supply Drive for the children of farm workers in 2023. It’s one of our favorite initiatives of the year, because it offers everyone the opportunity to give back to the families who work so hard to grow and harvest the produce we all eat. Farm workers earn so little that parents and grandparents often cannot afford to buy their children and grandchildren the school supplies they require. By giving backpacks filled with school supplies, we are taking a small step toward righting the injustices farm workers experience.

After F.E.P. team members prepared more than 150 backpacks, lauren and Alejandra set off for the first distribution in Orcutt, California, where our farm worker liaison Lizabeth Valdez was waiting with scores of eager families. In her blog post about the day, Alejandra explains: “We met the farm workers at Waller Park, where one of the children was celebrating their birthday. It was so heartwarming hearing all the kids squeal with excitement when they saw our SUV filled with backpacks. The kids loved all the designs, including Yoda, Pokémon, and Encanto. And, of course, the teenagers loved the simpler options. We also had a small number of baby backpacks containing blank cards and markers. This was for the parents who leave their babies with a sitter while they work, and their little ones loved it!” Alejandra adds: “The kids were so thankful, but we were so grateful to be able to do this for them and for their families. We reminded the children of how grateful we are for their parents and that this event is to help pave a better future for them and help them succeed.”

lauren and Alejandra then headed to a house in nearby Santa Maria and delivered the next group of backpacks. “We met an incredible young Indigenous activist, Paola, who helped translate in English, Spanish, and Mixteco,” writes Alejandra. The last group of backpacks went to farm workers at the mushroom farms in Half Moon Bay, California, who were impacted by gun violence in January 2023.

This annual School Supply Drive is made possible by F.E.P.’s generous supporters, and we are deeply grateful!



HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023

CHOCOLATE

Interview with Formerly Enslaved Child Worker and More

For decades, the chocolate industry has not sufficiently addressed accusations of child labor in its supply chain, and many companies refuse to release information about where they source their cocoa. Recently, many of the world's largest chocolate makers have admitted the existence of the worst forms of child labor, including slavery, within their supply chains, but this is only because they have been pressured by consumers. Consumers play a critical role in diminishing the food industry's injustices. Since our founding in 2007, F.E.P. has worked to inform them about the harsh reality of the chocolate industry.

As a result of our work, more and more confectioners are switching their cocoa suppliers as they move away from companies that source from child labor. In 2023, we were able to interview one of these formerly enslaved child workers, Nana Nyanteng Ahenkan, who inspired us with his story. Nana had been enslaved at a very young age, was regularly beaten and starved, and yet escaped to create a new life by starting his own Ghana-based company: Shahamana Chocolates. His goal is to help abolish child labor and slavery in the chocolate industry and to get children into schools instead of working on farms.

In addition to adding dozens more companies to our Chocolate List and free app, which has been downloaded more than 25,000 times, we gave our chocolate page a thorough update. We also noted in our newsletter the popularity of new vegan products from Hershey and Nestlé—including a vegan peanut butter cup and a vegan KitKat—and reminded our supporters that both these confection giants source their chocolate from areas where the worst forms of child labor take place to grow and harvest cocoa. This is another example of what we mean when we say that just because something is vegan that doesn't always mean it's cruelty-free!



ACTIVITIES, EVENTS, AND SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS IN 2023

TALKS:

Los Gatos Library, Los Gatos, California

Peace Advocacy Network *

Community Conversations, hosted by Maddie's Fund *

A Path Towards Food Justice, hosted by VegMichigan *

Food Justice and Sustainable Food Management, hosted by the EPA *

Swarthmore College Herbivore Club *

Bell High School, Hurst, Texas, Human Rights Advocacy Club *

* online

INTERVIEWS:



MEDIA

F.E.P.'s work was featured this year in the following articles and interviews.

 **daily meal** **Can You Eat Honey If You're Vegan?**
Date: January 6, 2023 | Source: Daily Meal

Meet The Latina Fighting Environmental Racism in Our Food System

Date: March 15, 2023 | Source: LATV



 **OneGreenPlanet** **10 Sweet, Savory, and International Rice Cake Recipes**

Date: April 18, 2023 | Source: One Green Planet

Vallejo Partnership Getting Community Members to Taste the Rainbow

Date: April 21, 2023 | Source: Vallejo Times Herald



 **CHAPEL BORO .COM** **Viewpoints: Human Rights Violations on Chiquita Banana Plantations**

Date: April 28, 2023 | Source: Chapelboro.com

Food For Thought: Food Deserts Should No Longer Be A Problem In New Orleans

Date: May 12, 2023 | Source: Via Nola Vic



Food Empowerment Project: A Path Towards Food Justice

Date: June 23, 2023 | Source: Kerulos Center

An Annotated Bibliography on Structural Racism Present in the U.S. Food System, Tenth Edition

Date: August 9, 2023 | Source: Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems



Workers Continue to Call for a Boycott a Year After Amy's Kitchen Closed a Major Factory

Date: August 15, 2023 | Source: Prism

No Meat Required: The Cultural History and Culinary Future of Plant-Based Eating

Date: August 15, 2023 | Source: Beacon Press



Feeding Hope, Serving Dignity: How Nonprofit Groups Fight Food Insecurity in Silicon Valley

Date: August 25, 2023 | Source: Bay City News

What Is Food Apartheid? How Big Meat Is Exacerbating Inequality Across the US

Date: August 29, 2023 | Source: VegNews



VegOut

How This Latina-Led Organization Champions Human and Animal Rights

Date: September 28, 2023 | Source: VegOut Magazine

SLO-Based Food Empowerment Project Informs and Equips Locals to Make Healthful, Impactful Choices

Date: September 28, 2023 | Source: New Times San Luis Obispo



 **VegNews** **Questions About Vegan Chinese Food? Consider This Site Your Fortune Cookie**

Date: September 28, 2023 | Source: VegNews

A Catalyst for Change: The Empowering Vision of Lauren Ornelas

Date: October 12, 2023 | Source: FlipIt



Sentient **What Food Justice Is and Why It Matters, Explained**

Date: November 16, 2023 | Source: Sentient Media

As A Latina Vegan, I'm Decolonizing a Cruel and Racist Food System

Date: November 20, 2023 | Source: MSN



VegOut

13 Vegan Nonprofits to Donate to This Giving Tuesday

Date: November 28, 2023 | Source: VegOut Magazine

California Has a Housing Crisis. Why Are Thousands of Farmworker Apartments Closed Each Year?

Date: December 13, 2023 | Source: The Sacramento Bee

