Dr. Vandana Shiva

Vandana Shiva, a world-renowned environmental thinker, activist, feminist, philosopher of science, writer and science policy advocate, is the founder of Navdanya Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (India) and President of Navdanya International. Trained as a Physicist at the University of Punjab, she completed her Ph.D. on the 'Hidden Variables and Non-locality in Quantum Theory' from the University of Western Ontario, Canada. She later shifted to inter-disciplinary research in science, technology and environmental policy, which she carried out at the Indian Institute of Science and the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore, India. In 1982 she founded the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE), an independent research institute that addresses the most significant problems of ecology of our times, and two years later, Navdanya ('nine seeds') the movement in defense of biodiversity and small farmers. In 2011 she founded Navdanya International in Italy and is Chairman of the International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture, co-founded with the then President of the Region of Tuscany. Recipient of many awards, including in 1993 the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize', and named among the top five “Most Important People in Asia” by AsiaWeek in 2001. She is a prolific writer and author of numerous books and serves on the board of the International Forum on Globalization, and member of the executive committee of the World Future Council.

Sean Brock

Raised in rural Virginia, Sean Brock is a distinguished chef and restauranteur known for his involvement in the repatriation of the Southern pantry and cuisine over the past 20 years. For over a decade, he was the chef and partner of McCrady’s and McCrady’s Tavern in Charleston, South Carolina, as well as the founding chef of Husk Restaurants, located in Charleston, Nashville, and Savannah. In 2019, he laid down roots in Nashville to open four ambitious and unique restaurant endeavors: Joyland, The Continental, Audrey, and the forthcoming June.

In 2020, Brock opened Joyland, the first of his solo restaurant projects, featuring high-quality fast food inspired by his love of cheesesburgers and Southern fried chicken. He then opened The Continental, an ode to fine dining that melds his passion for culinary history with the traditional elegance of the hotel restaurant experience. In October of 2021, Brock debuted his flagship restaurant, Audrey, in East Nashville. Named after his grandmother, Audrey is where he has furthered his life’s work of studying Appalachian foodways and hospitality. In summer of 2022, he opened June, located above Audrey, as a modern dining concept offering a unique tasting menu format that curiously explores the possibilities of ingredients indigenous to the American South.

Brock won the James Beard Award for Best Chef, Southeast in 2010, and is a four-time finalist for Outstanding Chef, as well as a three-time finalist for Rising Star Chef. His first cookbook, Heritage, is a New York Times bestseller and winner of the 2015 American Cooking James Beard Award. Brock’s second book, SOUTH, was also a New York Times bestseller and was nominated for a James Beard Award. Brock hosted season 2 of the Emmy Award-winning television show Mind of a Chef, produced by Anthony Bourdain. In 2019, Sean was featured on the popular Netflix show, Chef’s Table.

Sam Jett

As a Tennessee native born outside of Chattanooga, Sam Jett is the Director of Operations at Audrey. Stemming back to his early childhood memories with his mother and grandmother, Jett has had an affinity for food and cooking for as long as he can remember. While attending community college, Jett worked various restaurant manager and line cook positions before realizing that if he could spend and enjoy that much time in the kitchen, he ought to look at a career in the space. It was then that his brother bought him a copy of the book, “The Making of a Chef,” and the rest was history. In 2004, Jett enrolled in the Culinary Arts program at Johnson & Wales—Charlotte and following graduation, began his culinary endeavors working and learning about restaurants. He began working with Chef Sean Brock at 2013 for the opening of Husk Nashville. In 2015, Jett took on the role of Chef De Cuisine to open restauranteur Ashley Christensen’s Death & Taxes in Raleigh, NC, before heading back to work with Brock, where he has been the past eight years.

As Director of Operations, Jett is most passionate about taking care of others. This responsibility has become second nature in his daily routine as he regularly trains staff and leads them to flourish in the restaurants, an important skill he learned during his previous chef roles. At Audrey, Jett utilizes his past leadership experience to support both Hospitality and Culinary management as they guide and lead their own teams. With a deep-rooted passion for Appalachian food, the cuisine he grew up on, Jett looks forward to seeing the connections between what Chef Brock puts on the plate and the recipes his grandma used to make for him back in the day. Jett is also the Director of Operations for Sean Brock’s other Nashville concepts, including The Continental and Joyland. When he is not working, you can find him spending time with his wife and two daughters or heading to the gym.
Diane Wilson

Diane Wilson, a writer and educator, has published four award-winning books as well as essays in numerous publications.

Her 2021 novel, The Seed Keeper, received the 2022 Minnesota Book Award for Fiction. Her memoir, Spirit Car: Journey to a Dakota Past, won a 2006 Minnesota Book Award, while her 2011 nonfiction book, Beloved Child: A Dakota Way of Life, received the 2012 Barbara Sudler Award from History Colorado. Wilson’s middle-grade biography, Ella Cara Deloria: Dakota Language Protector, was an honor selection for the 2022 American Indian Youth Literature Award. Her essays have appeared in many anthologies, and her first picture book, Where We Come From—co-written with John Coy, Sun Yung Shin, and Shannon Gibney—was released in 2022.

Wilson has received a Bush Foundation Fellowship as well as awards from the Minnesota State Arts Board, the Jerome Foundation, and Pollen/Midwest (50 Over 50 Award). She is the former executive director of Dream of Wild Health (an Indigenous nonprofit farm) and the Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance (a national coalition of tribes and organizations working to create sovereign food systems for Native people). Wilson is a Mdewakanton descendant, enrolled on the Rosebud Reservation.

Rafael Mier

Rafael is founder and director of Fundación Tortilla (Tortilla Foundation) a non-profit organisation dedicated to promote corn and tortilla as fundamental elements of culture, nutrition and Mexico’s economic development.

Amongst his most outstanding actions, stands the legal presentation and promotion of a bill initiative for the modification of the norm that regulates corn tortillas in Mexico, the country’s most consumed product. Through Fundación Tortilla’s digital platforms, Rafael has developed information and communication strategies, of specialized contents on corn, which have created a digital community of more than 500,000 followers, which has a positive impact in more than 20 million people yearly.

As a promoter of knowledge and education on corn, Rafael has participated as speaker and trainer in more than 300 national and international forums, and collaborates actively with the media and relevant actors in the corn, agricultural, nutritional and educational sectors, in order to promote the positioning of corn as the pillar of Mexico’s national culture and nourishment.

In 2022, Rafael Mier was recognized as one of the four social entrepreneurial leaders in Mexico by the Visionaris Awards, granted by the UBS Bank.

Adel Takuri

Palestinian native Dr. Adel Takruri studied health, nutrition, plants, gardening, and environmental health, and has a passion for gardening and preserving seeds and plants. Ten years ago, upon returning to Palestine after living on the East Coast of the USA, Dr. Takruri noticed that there are some seeds and plants used in Palestine that are not well known in the USA, or are used in culturally different ways in the two places. He believes that introducing these seeds and their Palestinian uses is of interest to people outside of Palestine and can increase the world’s knowledge of seed, plant, and food diversity.
Alex Arzt

Alex Arzt is an artist, educator, arts administrator, and gardener living in Oakland, CA. Rooted in a connection to place and material explorations, she facilitates connections between human and nonhuman spaces by creating projects in the form of publications, interactive objects, workshops, lectures, and experimental gardens. From 2018-2022, she was an Affiliate Artist at The Headlands Center for the Arts in Sausalito, CA. She is a co-founder of the artist collective Whiz World and runs a small publishing press called A Magic Mountain.

Anna Timmerman

Anna Timmerman is an LSU AgCenter Horticulture Agent stationed in the New Orleans area. Timmerman is currently finishing a Master’s thesis on containerized citrus at Louisiana State University, and plans to pursue her PhD in Horticulture while running the new Louisiana Citrus Center of Excellence as a research farm in Violet, Louisiana in partnership with the Meraux Foundation. She lives and gardens in the Upper 9th Ward of New Orleans. Timmerman is passionate about sustainable, local foodways and works to preserve these cultural traditions via seed keeping, educational programming, and skill shares with other urban growers and eaters in Southeast Louisiana.

Alyssa Wilt

Alyssa Wilt is currently a preschool teacher and mentor for student teachers at the University of Minnesota Child Development Lab School. She has an M.Ed. and Minnesota Teaching License in ECE/Elementary Education. She is also an instructor in the Early Childhood program at the University of Minnesota. She has worked in the early childhood field since 2016.
**Bala Rathinasabapathi**

Bala Rathinasabapathi Ph.D. (Biology, 1990, University of Saskatchewan); M.Sc (Genetics, Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi) and B.Sc (Agriculture, Annamalai University, India). Currently Professor of Horticultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville.

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**Bonnetta Adeeb**

Bonnetta Adeeb is founder & president of STEAM ONWARD, Inc, a nonprofit organization in southern Maryland, as well as the projects Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance (UCFA) and Ujamaa Seeds. UCFA is a collective of emergent and seasoned growers who cultivate heirloom seeds and grow culturally relevant plants for food, healing, and textiles. Ujamaa recognizes the need for increased diversity in farming and the seed industry, and the need to provide more opportunities and support for growers from historically oppressed and marginalized communities. To this end, the UCFA is working to bridge the gap between prospective growers and seed companies. In addition, Bonnetta works with the Cooperative Gardens Commission to distribute free heirloom seeds to communities in need, serving 300 seed hubs nationally. January 12 saw the launch of the new Black Indigenous-led project, Ujamaa Seeds, an online store cultivating and distributing culturally important seeds to increase diversity in the seed industry.

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**Becki S Wells**

Rebecca S Wells spent her career in the Mortgage Finance and Marketing field holding positions of Vice President of Marketing, Chief Underwriter, Mortgage Loan Department Supervisor, and Regional Underwriter. Toward the end of her career, she conducted mortgage loan closings across the state of Iowa. Her hobby involves planting and designing Native Plant Gardens. She founded the Quad City Chapter of Wild Ones a year ago (quadcities.wildones.org), and the group has grown to 90+ members. This accomplishment is what she is most proud of. Rebecca lives in Port Byron Illinois, with her husband Wes and cat Smokey.
Cadine Navarro

As a tri-cultural artist, teacher and entrepreneur - born and raised in Japan (Kobe) of an American mother (Ohio) and French father (Normandy), Navarro has found home in seven countries across three continents, inspiring her to construct identity as ‘kin’ with all beings. This is a leitmotif and driving force behind the initiatives she takes to connect her work to persons and place. She has exhibited her work internationally (primarily Europe and North America) since 2004.

Charlie Miksicek

Charlie Miksicek is a retired archaeobotanist, former board member for Native Seeds/SEARCH, research associate for Missouri Botanical Garden, and lifelong gardener.

Chris Smith

Chris Smith is executive director of the Utopian Seed Project, a crop-trialing non-profit working to celebrate food and farming. Within this work, Chris collaborates on The Heirloom Collard Project, hosts a seasonal Trial to Table event series, and publishes Crop Stories, a crop specific multimedia project. His book, The Whole Okra, won a James Beard Foundation Award in 2020 and Chris is the co-host of The Okra Pod Cast. More info at blueandyellomakes.com and utopianseed.org
Christine Williams graduated with a degree in Floral Design and Management in 1987. After working at several flower shops, she became the head wedding designer at a high-end shop for several years, where she arranged designs for three weddings per weekend. Then she opened her own shop and became the preferred wedding designer for Chiefs Arrowhead events. Throughout this time, Christine has grown flowers, greenery, and fillers to use in her wedding designs so she doesn’t have to purchase from the wholesalers from May through October. Christine loves being able to provide brides with local, beautiful, long-lasting, pesticide free flowers. In 2016, Christine started teaching floral design classes to adults and teens, gardeners, and farmers. In 2019, Christine and her husband moved their urban farm to help build Agape Grow Education Center where they teach all types of gardening, cooking, floral design and art classes. Christine loves flowers, loves design, and loves sharing how to incorporate these gifts into the lives of others with flowers and plants grown in your garden.

Craig LeHoullier, long time SSE member and author of Epic Tomatoes and Growing Vegetables in Straw Bales, as well as leader of the Dwarf Tomato Breeding Project, holds storytelling, education, and growing the gardening community among his life’s top priorities.

Dianne Kadonaga's urban property has become Sunny Glen Garden - an educational demo garden showing how to turn urban lawns into beautiful organic permaculture food forests and wildlife habitats that support people, pollinators, and the planet. Sunny Glen Garden has won the City of Columbus GreenSpotLight Award for exemplary eco-friendly, zero waste, and sustainable business practices. Dianne has a plant nursery focusing on edible forest plants, rare native botanicals, and native plants for endangered Ohio native bees. As a Master Gardener Volunteer for both Franklin County, Ohio, and Yavapai County in Prescott, Arizona, a Pollinator Specialization Advocate, garden consultant and educator, Dianne loves sharing her growing experiences.
Evan Wisdom

Evan Wisdom (she/they) is a PhD candidate in the department of English at the University of Chicago. Her dissertation-in-progress, “Seed Media: Emergent Forms for the Environmental Humanities,” considers seeds in both fictional and real-world contexts to articulate their social, cultural, and political stakes in the ongoing climate crisis. She holds a BA Honours and MA from McGill University in Montréal, Québec, where she grew up.

Joann Calabrese

Joann Calabrese is a lifelong organic gardener, seed saver, and author of Growing Mindful, Explorations in the Garden to Deepen Your Awareness. She blogs regularly on the connections between gardens and intentional living. Joann is also Colorado Mental Wellness Network’s Recovery Education Director, providing training on recovery, wellness, and mindfulness.

Kayla Birdsong

Kayla has dedicated her career to innovative solutions to improving food access and security in the nonprofit sector. Kayla joined Fresh Food Connect in the summer of 2021 as CEO. Previously, she served for eight years at The GrowHaus, an award-winning nonprofit in Denver, where she executed the creation of a food system in a food desert, including elements of farming and production, food aggregation, distribution, retail, education and community outreach. Since 2018, Kayla has served on the board of advisors for Planet2Plate, a NY social enterprise launching a food incubator in Milwaukee. Kayla studied business management, has a certificate in Permaculture Design, and speaks Spanish.
Mara Welton

Mara Welton serves as the Director of Programs for Slow Food USA, developing nationwide programs and campaigns while coordinating and collaborating with global network leaders. Food production and access has been Mara's passion for over 30 years as a farmer/chef business owner and community organizer. She currently serves on the board of Helping And Nurturing Diverse Seniors, connecting seniors to healthy and culturally relevant food. Mara's 20 year career in farming brought her to Slow Food's biodiversity work and she served for 15 years in volunteer leadership roles both in Slow Food Vermont and Slow Food USA before coming on staff. Mara is a listed member of the Seed Savers Exchange.

Linda M. Conroy

Linda dedicates her life to connecting with the green world. She is a practicing herbalist, forager, farmer and community organizer. She provides herbal, wild and traditional food education, workshops and apprenticeships, as well as individual consultations to her community. Linda holds two masters degrees: MSS (Master of Social Service) and MLSP (Master of Law and Social Policy) as well as several certificates in the following areas of study: herbalism, permaculture, doula/midwifery care, and has trained as a wilderness first responder. Linda is the founder of the Moonwise Herbs, Wild Eats, The Midwest Women’s Herbal Conference and Mycelium Mysteries Conference.

Matt Powers

Author, educator, entrepreneur, farmer, seed saver, citizen scientist, and family guy; Matt Powers is author of Regenerative Soil and The Permaculture Student series.
Mel Trueblood-Stimpson

My name is Mel (they/them). I am Roma, Indigenous, of Jewish descent. I am Queer, 2S, Neurodivergent and low income. I am a scientist, consultant, NGO Director and professional disruptor passionate about decolonizing all fields of science.

Melanie Kirby

Melanie Kirby is an interdisciplinarian weaving the cultural, artistic, and scientific approaches to beekeeping by exploring kaleidoscopic concepts and implications of land stewardship, agroecology, food systems, biodiversity conservation, and outreach. In 2005, Melanie co-founded Zia Queenbees in the southern Rocky Mountains which specializes in breeding regionally-adaptive bees. A Fulbright-NatGeo Storytelling Fellow with a graduate degree in Entomology, she advocates for broadening the narrative of marginalized farmers and communities as a mestiza of mixed Indigenous ancestry. Melanie collaborates across cultures and landscapes promoting whole system approaches to pollinator conservation with diverse communities including Slow-Food-SlowBees and as founder of The Adaptive Bee Breeders Alliance.

Nicolas Walser

Nicolas Walser lives and works in the traditional territories of the Ktunaxa. He is the Project Coordinator for the Creston Community Seed Bank Society, where he conducts seed trials for climate adaptation. Nic holds a Bachelors of Applied Science in Sustainable Agriculture from Kwantlen Polytechnic University. He has been the field manager of various organic farms in BC. Previously he worked in the environmental non-profit sector, conducting restoration projects. Nic currently sits on Organic BC’s Accreditation Board, the Central Kootenay Food Policy Council, is the Secretary of IFOAM North America, and is a member of the BC Institute of Agrologists.
Regina Santore

Regina Rizzi Santore of Knoxville, Tennessee, is a lifelong vegetable gardener and recent gardener for wildlife support. She is currently vice president of Wild Ones, Smoky Mountains Chapter. A realtor, wife, and mother, she is in the process of doing a full restoration of her front yard to local, native plants, and seeking designation for it as a Homegrown National Park. She continues to raise the Rizzi family heirloom tomatoes for canning, to use in making her family's signature tomato sauce in the way she was taught by her father, Salvatore.

Sheila Williams Ridge

Sheila Williams Ridge is a director at the University of Minnesota Child Development Lab School in Minneapolis. She has a bachelor's degree in biology, a graduate degree in education, and over twenty years of experience as an early childhood administrator and educator. Sheila is co-author of the book, Nature-Based Learning for Young Children: Anytime, Anywhere, on Any Budget, published by Redleaf Press and several publications through NAAEE, MN Department of Education, and Environmental Kinship International. She serves on several boards that focus on early childhood education, equity, anti-bias education, environmental education, conservation, and K-12 education.

Steph Hughes

Steph Hughes (SeedChange) is a Program Manager with The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security and Co-Chair of the Community Seed Network. She is based in Mi’kma’ki, the unceded territories of the Mi’kmaq people, in present day Nova Scotia. She has an undergraduate degree in International Development Studies and a graduate degree in Adult Education. Inspired by the connection between seed and social change, Steph has worked as part of Canada's seed movements for the last 10 years.
Briana Burke

Briana Burke grew up in the Driftless Region, where her mother instilled in her a love of the land and nature by tending flowers and vegetables in her garden every summer. As a child, Bri didn’t much care for all of the hard work gardening required, but as an adult, she is enamored with the power gardening has to connect us with our food and land. Bri earned a bachelor’s degree in conservation biology; during her studies, she noticed that almost every conservation issue came back to our broken food system. This realization inspired her to pursue work in food systems to address the array of symptoms caused by this disconnect, including nutrition, climate change, conservation, and sustainable communities. She is over the moon to be working as the seed bank manager at Seed Savers Exchange because she gets to live in her favorite place (Decorah!) and work on one of humanity’s most important issues, our food system, by helping to preserve the seeds of our diverse garden heritage so people today and tomorrow can continue to connect with their food.

Josie Flatgard

Josie is the Exchange & Outreach Coordinator at Seed Savers Exchange. In this position, she coordinates the production of the annual Yearbook publication, oversees the online platform and Facebook group, and engages with current and potential Exchange listers. With an education background in sustainability, human ecology, and journalism, Josie is passionate about the power of sharing stories and finding connection. A South Dakota native, she has most recently worked on various environmental stewardship efforts, including local garden initiatives. Josie is nurturing a garden of her own for the first time this year and is eager to harvest, among many things, Exchange varieties ‘Enrico Rao’ arugula and ‘Obtuse du Doubs’ carrots.

Kate Rowe

Kate Rowe, Seed Savers Exchange Evaluation Manager, began farming near Chicago after earning her graduate degree from Savannah College of Art and Design and serving in AmeriCorps. Later, Kate moved to the East Coast, where she started a restaurant farm, managed a CSA farm, worked on small-scale dairies, made cheese, and eventually ran her own small farm in the Hudson Valley. As the SSE Evaluation Manager, Kate is responsible for growing out, evaluating, and collecting data from select varieties in the SSE seed collection, coordinating trials for the Collection to Catalog initiative, and running the community science ADAPT program. When she is not working, Kate loves to cook, spend time with her family and friends, bike, and garden.
Brennan Allsworth

Brennan Allsworth, Field Operations Coordinator at Seed Savers Exchange, is an avid seed steward who enjoys countless aspects of farming; from starting plants in early spring to cultivating throughout the year, harvesting, baking and fermenting. Brennan brings a diverse experience to the crew, having worked and volunteered on farms, homesteads, and community gardens around the country and world. He has worked on small and medium-sized organic vegetable farms, farmed as a research grower for nonprofits and large-scale grain processing companies, grown as a contract grower for several small seed companies, and was involved in starting a small farming cooperative that grows seeds, vegetables, fruits, livestock, and more. Originally from northern Illinois and having spent nearly a decade in the hills of Boise, Idaho, Brennan is happy to be back in the Midwest, making northeast Iowa home. When not farming, they can be found strumming the banjo, hiking, sporting, and making delicious foods with loved ones.

Jeanine Scheffert

Jeanine Scheffert, Seed Savers Exchange Education & Engagement Manager, comes to her position with a passion for facilitating connection, engagement, and empowerment, and a wealth of education experience from 20 years of work in the field. Overseeing the Education & Engagement department, she is responsible for programming including our annual conference, in-person and online events, online education, Community Seed Network, tours, workshops, speaking engagements, internship program, volunteer program, seed donation program, and more.

Mike Bollinger

Mike Bollinger is the current executive director at Seed Savers Exchange and also co-owner of River Root Farm, a certified organic vegetable farm and greenhouse operation in Decorah, Iowa. For nearly two decades, he has focused his energy on local food production and farmer education. Mike not only has a practical understanding of organic and sustainable growing practices, he has also dedicated years supporting the development of resilient food systems, assisting organizations and businesses across the country. His belief in servant-based leadership and collaborative work environments shine through whether sharing the ins-and-Outs of crop selection, plant production, or the value of robust seed regeneration systems.
Christi Nickey

Christi Nickey is a fourth-generation family farmer from Central Indiana with deep roots in the Moravian and Munsee-Delaware communities. She has worked in food systems for more than 20 years as a Professional Chef/Restaurateur and through running market farms, working with food rescues, and managing CSAs. Christi attended Clemson University with an Animal Science/Pre-Veterinary focus and recently graduated from MIU in Fairfield, Iowa with a BS in Regenerative Organic Agriculture. She has three exceptional children and loves to spend time alongside them cycling, hiking, kayaking, and exploring all that Decorah has to offer.

Justin Skarin

Originally from Western-Illinois, Justin moved to the Driftless area in 2018 and has been working at Seed Savers Exchange since 2020. A Fayette County Master Gardener through Iowa State Extension and Outreach, Justin’s background has primarily been in home gardening prior to joining SSE. His at-home experience has focused on native plant landscaping, kitchen/preservation gardening, and community gardening with a focus on food pantry production. His time at SSE has been spent in field work, greenhouse work, seed processing, and packaging/distribution of seed in our seed house.