



**GORGE
GROWN**
FOOD NETWORK

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IMPACT REPORT

2024

MISSION

Our mission is to build an inclusive, resilient regional food system that improves the health and well-being of our community.

VISION

We envision a healthy, self-sufficient, vibrant Columbia River Gorge where our food is produced with integrity and is valued, abundant, and accessible to all.

VALUES

Collaboration · Integrity · Inclusivity
Innovation · Justice





OUR WORK

Our work seeks to impact three key areas in order to build an inclusive, resilient regional food system.

BUILD THE SUPPLY OF LOCAL FOOD

We must grow enough food locally with environmental and social integrity to meet regional demand. We work to ensure that local producers have access to land, equipment, infrastructure, financing, education, and support they need.

INCREASE ACCESS TO LOCAL FOOD FOR EVERYONE

Local food should be available and accessible to all. We work to bring affordable local food to *everyone* in our community.

MOBILIZE A THRIVING LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENT

A regional food system requires leadership, partnership, and advocacy. We convene leaders and advance policies that support inclusive food systems, including land access, tribal food sovereignty, and regenerative farming practices.

KEY MILESTONES IN 2024



FOOD SECURITY COALITION partners distributed 860 holiday meal boxes to food insecure families.



FARMERS MARKETS: Our three markets brought nearly \$1.5 million into the local economy.



CROP TALKS: 84 people representing 36 businesses or farms attended 7 educational farm tours.



FARMERS MARKETS: 75% of vendor businesses are owned or co-owned by women.



GORGE GLEANING: 225 volunteers helped harvest 12,000 pounds of fresh produce that would have gone to waste.



MERCADO DEL VALLE: We supported 6 BIPOC vendors financially to overcome barriers like renting kitchen space.



SNAP & SNAP MATCH: We harnessed \$110,851 in funding to help families in need to buy food at farmers markets.



FILL YOUR PANTRY: We coordinated a one-day bulk buying market to bring an extra \$33,000+ in sales to local farmers before winter.



FARMLAND PRESERVATION: Convened 19 organizations quarterly to protect farmland and make it more accessible to beginning farmers.



PROGRAM UPDATE: VEGGIE RX

Gorge Grown's award winning Veggie Rx Program has channeled over half a million dollars to local farmers to provide fresh produce to those that need it most. We've successfully advocated for sustainable funding through healthcare at a local, state and federal level. In 2025, the local farmer-owned Gorge Farmers Collective will take the lead on expanding Veggie Rx with support from PacificSource and the Oregon Health Authority. While we remain committed to advocating for the Veggie Rx Program and other food assistance efforts, we are shifting our focus toward addressing the root causes of hunger through systemic change and cross-sector collaboration.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

MERCADO DEL VALLE

Mercado del Valle is a Latine*-led initiative designed to create a vibrant space of belonging and economic opportunity. Mercado del Valle, was established in 2013 by and for the farmworker community of Odell, a town of 3,000 with a 69% Latine population. The market is located near Mid-Valley Elementary, where 80.5% of students are Latine and 84% are economically disadvantaged.



Photo from David Hanson.

This market represents years of collaborative work reflected in a beloved community gathering where local entrepreneurs sell fresh produce and traditional foods.

Mercado is driven by six goals:

- Support local entrepreneurs and small businesses
 - Increase access to fresh, locally grown food
 - Build community
 - Celebrate Latine culture
- Provide information to improve community health
 - Promote literacy

Gorge Grown hires well-connected bilingual leaders to coordinate this culturally specific market. Since 2018, Yelitza Boots has managed the program. Yeli engages community partners, recruits entrepreneurs and musicians, provides technical assistance to entrepreneurs, and mentors high school interns. Joel Pelayo, co-founder of Mercado del Valle and Raíces Cooperative Farm, not only grows and sells produce but also coordinates La Mesa Comunitaria (the Community Table), where other local gardeners can sell their produce.

Many aspiring entrepreneurs face challenges like costly commercial kitchen rentals and complex licensing. To address this, Gorge Grown secured funding in 2024 to provide stipends and reimbursements for six BIPOC-owned start-ups, helping them overcome these barriers and boosting Mercado's stability and inclusivity. In 2025, we aim to expand this support to more BIPOC-owned food and beverage businesses, promoting broader economic growth and empowerment in the community.



**Latine is a gender-neutral way to describe or refer to people with Latino origins and is more consistent with Spanish pronunciations. We acknowledge that pan-ethnic identifiers are imperfect and used to encompass a wide variety of identities and cultures that may be impossible to fully capture under a single label.*



COLUMBIA GORGE FOOD SECURITY COALITION

Gorge Grown plays a key role as a convener of the Columbia Gorge Food Security Coalition. The Coalition fosters cross-sector collaboration between more than 50 organizations to tackle complex food system challenges, with a strong focus on equity.

"We commit to creating a just, equitable local food system based on solidarity and dignity. We acknowledge that the current food system is built upon and perpetuates the oppression of historically excluded communities. We will confront the systemic injustices that create and perpetuate poverty and hunger."

- Food Security Coalition Equity Statement

Increasing Public Discourse: We provide platforms for civic dialogue on controversial food system issues. Through the Food Security Coalition, film screenings, and conferences, we amplify marginalized voices and inequities in the food system while fostering respectful communication. In May 2024, we hosted a forum on proposed changes to farmworker housing regulations, which increased awareness, garnered media attention, and strengthened support for farmworkers and fair labor advocates.

KEY INITIATIVES SUPPORTED BY GORGE GROWN

HEALTHY FARMS & FARMWORKERS

Together, nine organizations work together to mitigate the negative impacts of agricultural chemicals in the Gorge, especially among Latine farmworkers who experience frequent exposure to toxic pesticides and fungicides. Latine organizers make up 60% of the participants' initiative. 2024 efforts include pesticide safety training in Spanish and public tours of organic farms/gardens to promote chemical-free food production.

TRIBAL FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

This initiative brings together members from six tribes, including the Cayuse/ Umatilla, Nez Perce, Warm Springs, and Yakama Nations. Indigenous members make up 80% of participants. Key efforts of this initiative include:

- **Securing Access to Land:** Collaborating with local land trusts to ensure Indigenous people have access to traditional food gathering, healing ceremonies, and stewardship activities.
- **Workshops for Indigenous People:** Organizing free food preservation workshops, led by and for Indigenous community members.

Our goal is to support Indigenous people in reclaiming control over their food systems and fostering resilience through community-driven solutions.

Gorge Grown's Board President, Buck Jones, co-chairs the Tribal Food Sovereignty Committee.





Photo From Paloma Ayala.

Gorge Grown Farmers Markets provide a low-barrier entry point for farms and food businesses to offer their products and help to incubate new businesses. Farmers markets can be especially important to business owners with limited access to the capital often required to start a business. Historically this has included Black, Hispanic or Latine, Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American or Native Alaskan communities and women.

FOOD BUSINESS INCUBATOR PROGRAM

In 2024, our programs supported 270 farmers and producers. Key services include:

Technical Assistance: Our staff provide technical assistance to overcome barriers specific to farming, food and beverage industries.

Connections: Entrepreneurs are linked with lenders, grants, shared equipment, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and partners like the Small Business Development Center.

Market Access: We connect producers to buyers through farmers markets, distributors, events, online directories, and media.

Advocacy: We advocate for food and beverage entrepreneurs, ensuring they access to funding and resources. We also educate policymakers on regenerative agriculture, land access, fair labor, and other key food system issues.



In 2025, we are committed to expanding our Food Business Incubator Program by prioritizing support for businesses owned by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). This includes convening key partners to explore opportunities for developing vital food infrastructure. By providing these resources, we aim to empower entrepreneurs to thrive in the food industry and promote long-term economic growth within underrepresented communities.

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resilient regional food system that
improves the health and-well being
of our community.

Support our work
www.gorgegrown.com



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