

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



JAMES BEARD FOUNDATION® CELEBRATES 2024 LEADERSHIP AWARD HONOREES

NEW YORK (June 9, 2024) – The James Beard Foundation® recognized and celebrated the honorees of the 2024 James Beard Leadership Awards presented by Capital One, at a ceremony and luncheon in Chicago on Sunday, June 9, 2024. The Leadership Awards are one of the James Beard Foundation’s three Achievement Awards, which also include the Lifetime Achievement and Humanitarian of the Year Awards. All honorees were previously announced on April 3, 2024.

The Leadership Awards program recognizes achievement by individuals and organizations actively working to set standards that create more equitable, just, sustainable, and economically viable food systems for producers, workers, and consumers alike. The program, which awards five candidates, has a dedicated voting body comprising a subcommittee and judges. Previous honorees are also invited to vote.

The 2024 Leadership Awards Ceremony took place at The Dalcy in Chicago, Illinois, where guests enjoyed a seated luncheon. The event honored the remarkable achievements of the 2024 Leadership Awards honorees recognizing achievement in food systems change. Hosted by James Beard Humanitarian of the Year and Leadership Award honoree, **Karen Washington, Co-Founder of Black Farmer Fund and Black Urban Growers**, the event also featured a menu created and executed by **James Beard Award-winning chef, Gregory Gourdet of kann (Portland, OR), alongside chefs C.J. Jacobson of Aba (Chicago, IL; Austin, TX; and Miami, FL) and Éma (Chicago, IL), and Eric Santoyo of Aba and The Dalcy (Chicago, IL).** The gathering was a memorable celebration of exceptional leadership across the areas of sustainability, policy advocacy, industry culture and practices, and food security and access.

“The Leadership Awards shine a spotlight on the inspiring individuals and organizations working to establish a more equitable, sustainable, and economically viable food system,” said **Clare Reichenbach, CEO, James Beard Foundation.** “We extend our heartfelt congratulations to the 2024 Leadership honorees for their vision and unwavering dedication to a more just and resilient food future. They truly embody our Good Food for Good mission.”

“It is an incredible honor to host this year’s ceremony and to celebrate the remarkable achievements of the 2024 Leadership Award honorees,” said **host Karen Washington, Farmer, Activist, 2023 Humanitarian of the Year honoree (with Olivia Watkins), and 2014 James Beard Leadership Award honoree.** “This year’s honorees’ dedication to the food ecosystem has truly bettered the lives of others and society at large. I know for a fact, the profound impact this recognition has on our collective mission.”

“Everybody eats! And the Leadership Awards honorees make it easier for everyone on this planet to enjoy earth’s bounty. These honorees serve as a beacon and source of inspiration for all of us dedicated to a more equitable and sustainable future for food,” said **Lakisha May, chair of the Leadership Awards Subcommittee.** “On behalf of the Leadership Awards subcommittee and its judges, we are proud to congratulate and recognize the hard work and commitment of this year’s honorees.”

The 2024 Leadership Awards categories were created by the James Beard Foundation, with input from the Leadership Subcommittee, as a reflection of the Foundation's policy agenda and its impact priorities for 2023-2024. The voting process for the Leadership Awards can be [found here](#), and the 2024 eligibility criteria and categories can be [found here](#).

The 2024 Leadership Award honorees are:

SUSTAINABILITY: Leaders who are advancing environmental sustainability in support of a better supply chain for restaurants. Their efforts may focus on healthy soil, clean oceans, sustainable fisheries, reducing food waste, or regenerative agriculture.

- **Mai Nguyen**, Farmer, Farmer Mai
Mai Nguyen is a first-generation Vietnamese-American farmer who began their career as a research assistant studying the effects of carbon on the atmosphere and soil. Wanting to make more of an impact, they focused their efforts on disaster relief and water sanitation projects for refugee camps in Southeast Asia, which opened their eyes to the broader implications of food security and sustainability. The child of Vietnamese refugees, Nguyen returned to their roots in California to support the diaspora community and advocate for equitable ecological food systems through environmentally beneficial farming practices. Nguyen specializes in site-appropriate and soil-enriching approaches to growing organic heirloom grains and Southeast Asian crops in Sebastopol, California. Through their leadership as co-director of Minnow, which works to secure land tenure for California's farmers of color and Indigenous communities, Nguyen helps facilitate democratic organization for land justice. In 2017, in response to systemic discrimination faced by farmers of color, Nguyen helped pass the Farmer Equity Act in California, which acknowledges socially disadvantaged producers within the agricultural system and has created policies to advance equity.

In response to winning, **Mai Nguyen** stated: "I am honored to be recognized for my efforts to use food to address the greatest challenges of our time: climate change and social inequality. May this award, and the other honorees and many worthy nominees, catalyze collaborations that accelerate us towards a more just, ecologically healthy, and delightful world."

POLICY ADVOCACY: Policymakers or advocates who are advancing a Farm Bill and/or federal legislation or regulations that prioritize climate change mitigation, racial and gender equity, or industry practices that foster a more sustainable and equitable restaurant industry.

- **Niaz Dorry**, Coordinating Director, North American Marine Alliance (NAMA), Executive Director, National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC)

Niaz Dorry has played a pivotal role in steering federal legislation towards recognizing and supporting small-scale, traditional, and Indigenous fishing communities through her leadership in the North American Marine Alliance (NAMA) and collaboration with the National Family Farm Coalition. By advocating for policies that prioritize ecological sustainability and equity, she has helped to bridge the gap between land and sea food systems, emphasizing the importance of including seafood in comprehensive food system discussions. Her efforts to raise awareness about the critical role of small-scale, values-based fisheries in mitigating climate change and advancing gender and racial equity have inspired more sustainable practices within the restaurant industry. Dorry has been recognized as a "Hero for the Planet" by Time magazine.

"This award is a powerful affirmation of our collective fight against the unchecked expansion of the industrial food system and factory farms on land and at sea," said **Niaz Dorry**. "This is a call to resist the corporate powers that have captured our food value chains and to bolster community-based food providers. We have the power to feed ourselves while honoring our planet, animal kin, and communities."

INDUSTRY CULTURE AND PRACTICES: Leaders who have made a significant impact and are acknowledged and recognized as setting industry standards, with a commitment to transforming the industry into one that is sustainable and equitable. These leaders have put in place systems and policies that prioritize the physical and mental health of employees and themselves and have proven to make for a sound financial model for staff and owners alike that foster longevity in the restaurant industry. They are modeling how to make independent restaurants more equitable both within and beyond one's own businesses.

- **Muhammad Abdul-Hadi**, Founder/Owner, Down North Pizza and Down North Foundation

Muhammad Abdul-Hadi is the founder and owner of Down North Pizza, a mission-driven restaurant that exclusively hires formerly incarcerated individuals and serves up pies with a purpose in North Philadelphia. Leveraging his academic background in criminal justice and law enforcement administration, and experiences as an entrepreneur, Muhammad embarked on a path to reimagine a business leader's role in supporting underserved communities. Through fair wages, innovative hiring practices, and community building, he is on a mission to help reduce recidivism rates, particularly in the Black community. In addition to earning the James Beard Foundation's 2024 Leadership Award, Muhammad was selected as an advisor in JBF's Legacy Network Cohort '23-'24, a program that trains emerging leaders across the culinary industry and connects them with future generations of excellence.

In response to winning this award, **Muhammad Abdul-Hadi** shared his favorite sentiment: "Hope is an action, not a feeling."

FOOD SECURITY AND ACCESS: Leaders who have advanced nutrition security, an issue that has directly impacted many independent chefs and restaurants, most notably through SNAP and SNAP expansion, community engagement, and beyond.

- **Helga Garza**, Executive Director, Agri-Cultura Cooperative Network / La Cosecha

Helga Garza is the executive director of Agri-Cultura Network—a farmer-owned cooperative providing access to local and sustainably grown produce—and of their community supported agricultural program, La Cosecha CSA. For over 50 years, Garza has been a driving force for food justice and a dedicated community organizer, working on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border. The daughter of an activist and a member of a marginalized Native Indigenous community, Garza's efforts are driven by her deep commitment to building an equitable and sustainable food system, empowering communities through education, and making healthy food accessible to low-income households. After spending 20 years as an organic farmer, Garza now advocates for farmers' rights on environmental contamination issues. Her work has enabled hundreds of families to access fresh, local produce using SNAP funds. Beyond SNAP expansion, her efforts in community engagement and education around sustainable agriculture practices have empowered both urban and rural farmers, contributing to a more resilient and nutrition-secure food system. Garza is based in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and is currently focused on building a multi-million dollar solar-powered "Eco-Wellness" clinic that aims to bridge the gap between sustainable agricultural practices and nutritional wellbeing.

"I am honored to be accepting the James Beard Leadership award on behalf of my organization Agri-Cultura Cooperative Network, all of my mentors, and community that have supported my leadership growth over so many years," said honoree **Helga Garza**. "I am also thrilled to share time and space with all of the awardees and share a platform that highlights food in addressing the social determinants of health."

EMERGING LEADERSHIP: The Leadership Subcommittee may select an additional honoree to highlight a person or collective who is at the beginning of their career but already doing significant work.

- **Christa Barfield**, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, FarmerJawn

Christa Barfield is the founder and chief executive officer of FarmerJawn—a 128-acre working farm providing access to regenerative organic food production through a community supported agriculture (CSA) program, storefronts, and educational programs—and Viva Leaf Tea Co., a farm-to-cup tea brand. Barfield’s initiatives are designed not just to provide organic foods in areas of food apartheid, but also to educate on the importance of sustainable agriculture and healthy eating through on-farm and in-school programming. Her latest venture, CornerJawn, is a redefined corner store experience that makes fresh produce more accessible to underserved communities. With CornerJawn, Barfield is nurturing a movement towards sustainable living and conscious eating for all. Barfield’s work is making a significant impact on Philadelphia’s food system and offering a model for urban food justice and entrepreneurship. Barfield is a Generation Change fellow, Philadelphia’s Community Wellness Leader, and is recognized as a "Food is Medicine" and nutrition security champion by the USDA.

"I am accepting the James Beard Leadership Award on behalf of my dedicated team at FarmerJawn," said **Christa Barfield**. "This award really highlights our commitment to changing the food system for the better. I believe that food is medicine and I’m farming America back to health. With sustainable practices and a focus on community, we’re excited to keep pushing for a healthier, fairer food future for everyone."

The James Beard Awards, considered to be among the nation’s most prestigious honors, recognize exceptional talent in the culinary and food media industries, as well as a demonstrated commitment to racial and gender equity, community, sustainability, and a culture where all can thrive. James Beard Awards policies and procedures can be viewed at jamesbeard.org/awards/policies.

The 2024 James Beard Awards are presented by Capital One, the official credit card and banking partner of the James Beard Foundation. The James Beard Awards are proudly hosted by Choose Chicago and the Illinois Restaurant Association, and presented in association with Chicago Department of Aviation, Clover from Fiserv, Hilton, as well as with the following partners: Premier Sponsors: Acqua Panna® Natural Spring Water, American Airlines, the official airline of the James Beard Foundation, HEINZ, HMHost, S.Pellegrino® Sparkling Natural Mineral Water, Stella Artois; Supporting Sponsors: HexClad Cookware, Skuna Bay Salmon; Reception Sponsors: Ecolab, Kendall College at National Louis University, Windstar Cruises, the official cruise line of the James Beard Foundation; Additional Support Sponsors: Cristaux, Paperchase, Plugrà® Premium European Style Butter, Tito’s Handmade Vodka, VerTerra Dinnerware. Intersport is the Official Broadcast Partner of the 2024 James Beard Awards.

For more information about the James Beard Awards, visit jamesbeard.org/awards. For up-to-the-minute news about the Awards, follow @beardfoundation on X (Twitter) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/beardfoundation) and keep an eye out for posts using #jbfa.

PRESS ASSETS

- Image selects (please credit the photographer listed in file details):
 - Photo selects will be [available at this link](#) the afternoon / evening of June 9
- Awards press kit: [available at this link](#).
- Awards videos: visit our [YouTube page](#) to watch Awards explainer videos as well as past videos from the James Beard Awards.

ABOUT THE JAMES BEARD AWARDS

The James Beard Awards recognizes exceptional talent and achievement in the culinary arts, hospitality, media, and broader food system, as well as a demonstrated commitment to racial and gender equity, community, sustainability, and a culture where all can thrive. Established in 1990, the James Beard Awards are among the nation’s most prestigious honors recognizing leaders in the culinary and food media industries. The Awards are overseen by the Awards Committee. Each Awards program (Book, Broadcast Media, Journalism, Leadership, and Restaurant and Chef) has its own subcommittee members

who volunteer their time to oversee the policies, procedures, and selection of judges for their respective program. All James Beard Award honorees receive a certificate and a medallion engraved with the James Beard Foundation Awards insignia. For more information, subscribe to the [Awards digital newsletter](#).

ABOUT THE JAMES BEARD FOUNDATION

The James Beard Foundation (JBF) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that celebrates and supports the people behind America's food culture, while pushing for new standards in the restaurant industry to create a future where all have the opportunity to thrive. Established over 30 years ago, the Foundation has highlighted the centrality of food culture in our daily lives and is committed to supporting a resilient and flourishing industry that honors its diverse communities. By amplifying new voices, celebrating those leading the way, and supporting those on the path to do so, the Foundation is working to create a more equitable and sustainable future—what we call Good Food for Good®. JBF brings its mission to life through the annual Awards, industry and community-focused programs, advocacy, partnerships, and events across the country. For the first time in the Foundation's history, exceptional culinary talent, industry leaders, and visitors from NYC and beyond can experience unforgettable dining and educational programming at [Platform by JBF](#)—inspiring food and beverage devotees for decades to come. Learn more at jamesbeard.org, sign up for our newsletter, and follow [@beardfoundation](#) on social media.

ABOUT CAPITAL ONE

At Capital One, we're on a mission for our customers – bringing them best-in-class products, rewards, service, and experiences. Capital One is a diversified bank that offers products and services to individuals, small businesses, and commercial clients. We use technology, innovation, and interaction to provide consumers with products and services to meet their needs. Through Capital One Dining and Capital One Entertainment, we provide our rewards cardholders with access to unforgettable experiences in the areas they're passionate about, including dining, music, sports and the arts. Learn more at capitalone.com/dining and capitalone.com/entertainment.

CONTACT

MMGY Wagstaff
jbf@wagstaffmktg.com