

## BFS CONFERENCE: CULTIVATING BLACK FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN TORONTO NOVEMBER 27 – 28, 2020

### SUMMARY REPORT

#### ABOUT THE CONFERENCE:

Black Canadian communities experience high levels of food insecurity: a recent study found that almost 30% of Black households experience food insecurity, and Black households are 3.6 times more likely to be food insecure than white households. This level of Black food insecurity illustrates a lack of access to food, lack of control over their access to food, and the extent to which Black communities are structurally disadvantaged in Canadian society. However, a vigorous but under-resourced community effort has been working toward Black food security for the past 25 years at least.

Delivered by the grassroots community group, Black Food Sovereignty Initiative Toronto, the Cultivating Black Food Sovereignty Conference was delivered with support from the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit at the City of Toronto, Ryerson University and Food Secure Canada, and was envisioned as a way to safely engage with community and collaboratively work to help imagine and envision what Black Food Sovereignty could look like in Toronto. The conference brought together community residents and organizational and grassroots representatives from Toronto's Black communities whose professional or activist contributions focus on food access, food policy, farming, and/or the social determinants of health, and representatives from the City's CABR Unit and other relevant policy stakeholders involved with Black communities in Toronto. In addition, the conference welcomed a small number of interested participants from allied research or policy communities.

#### ENGAGEMENT:

- 12 speakers from across Canada, the United States and internationally (i.e. Ethiopia, Kenya, United Kingdom, Greece, Russia)
- Engaged 15 young leaders to guide conference conversations
- Over 250 registrants
- Partnered with over 30 community agencies serving Toronto's diverse black communities

#### WHAT WE HEARD:

*"Black Food Sovereignty plays an important role in promoting awareness and intentional action for the not just those involved in community food system work, but your everyday household and citizen. Black Food Sovereignty facilitates relational and accessible connections to issues such as decolonization, the oppression and displacement of food systems and peoples, the importance of ancestral knowledge, and the power in cooperative enterprise and collective action. This role provides a strong foundation on which to build greater civic engagement in just food communities."*

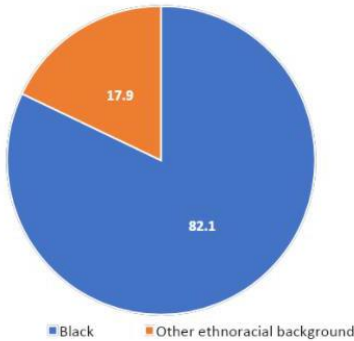
*"Organizations involved in BFS work specifically, operate with an understanding of a regenerative and distributive economy, respecting social foundations and ecological limits, in order to provide a safe and just space for humanity."*

*"We need a black food strategy funded by the government of Toronto. We shouldn't have to worry about chasing dollars; there needs to be access to core services to support health and food access."*

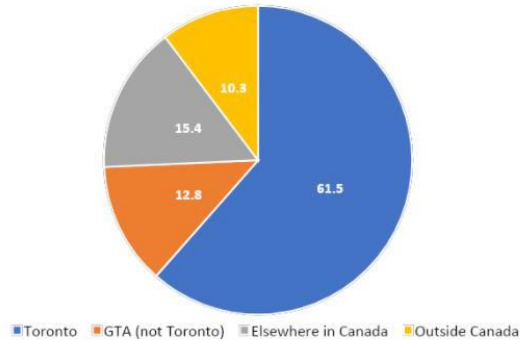
**PARTICIPANT PROFILE:**

**Figure 1. Participants' background (N=39)**

Ethno-racial background (%)



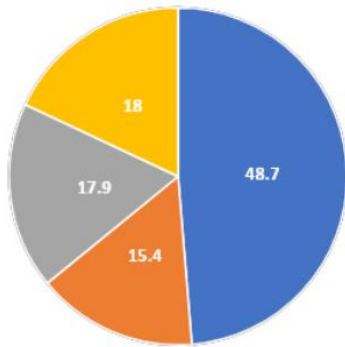
Where attendees lived (%)



*"The input of Toronto's Black communities is most critical when confronting and removing barriers caused by anti-Black racism in Toronto's sustainable food systems, we are all part of the food system, we all eat food."*

**Figure 2. Participants' affiliations (N=39)**

% of participants identifying various affiliations

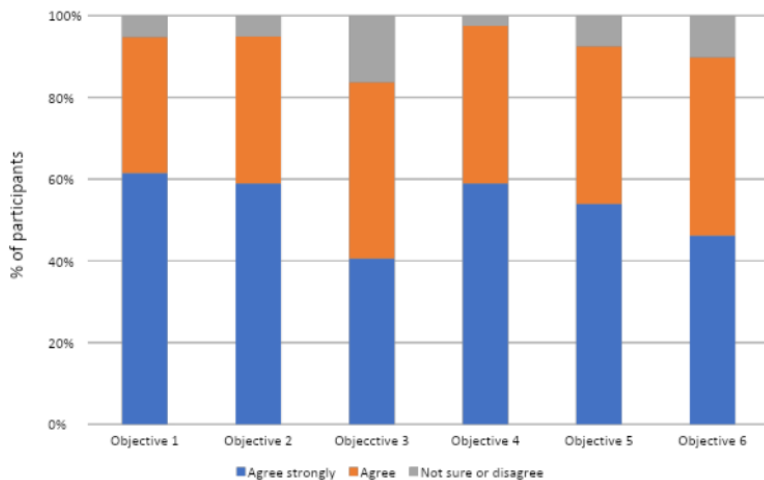


*"Food sovereignty is one of the ways that we will achieve Black liberation. Through food sovereignty we can begin to mend the divisions that have been created amongst our communities... food tells the story of our ancestors and connects us to our ancestors"*

*"It's about capacity bridging and capacity building. In response to the pandemic what we wanted to do was to ensure that our clients and their families ate well in a difficult time, but also feed their spirit, minds, as well as bodies... to take away at least one of their stressors (food)."*

■ Community member  
 ■ Food justice organization  
 ■ Food systems/farming organization

**Figure 3. Participants indicated that the conference achieved its objectives (N=39)**



- Objective 1: generate shared understanding of Black food sovereignty
- Objective 2: strengthen commitment to build Black Food Sovereignty Alliance
- Objective 3: capture community input on how to move forward
- Objective 4: articulate inter-connectedness of anti-racism and Black food sovereignty
- Objective 5: prepare the ground for community-informed vision of Black food sovereignty
- Objective 6: articulate the role of the City of Toronto in supporting the Black Food Sovereignty Alliance



**CONFRONTING ANTI-BLACK RACISM**  
 Toronto