



REGIONAL FOOD AGGREGATION AND DISTRIBUTION SUMMIT

Friday, May 17, 2024

SPEAKER BIOS

Renee Catacalos

Author, [The Chesapeake Table](#), Director of Strategic Investments, [FRESHFARM](#)

Renee Catacalos has been a champion of Chesapeake regional farms and food since her days as publisher and editor of Edible Chesapeake magazine in the mid-200s. She is the author of the 2018 book *The Chesapeake Table: Your Guide to Eating Local*. She has previously worked for or served on the boards of several local food/agriculture organizations, including ECO City Farms, Future Harvest CASA, and twice serving on the board of FRESHFARM, which she joined in March 2024 as Director of Strategic Investments. Before that, she spent five years working in national food systems philanthropy with Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders, where she was Vice President for Strategy and Impact. Renee is committed to developing strategic partnerships between nonprofits and philanthropy to address the most pressing regional food system challenges.

Will Gray

Managing Director, [Eastern Food Hub Collaborative](#)

Will Gray has been working as a local food system practitioner and advocate for 14 years. Since beginning his food career in restaurant kitchens, Will has followed his passion for sustainable agriculture and food systems through meat processing, winemaking, craft brewing, supply chain logistics, and advocacy and movement-building nationwide. Will is a founding partner of Seed Change Strategies, a facilitation, consulting, and technical assistance group focused on supporting collaborative approaches to spark and sustain transformational change in the food system. Since 2022, he has served as Managing Director of the Eastern Food Hub Collaborative, a network of local food hubs practicing collective entrepreneurship to expand market access for farmers and increase equitable access to good food for all. He is also the founder and CEO of Back Pocket Provisions in Richmond, VA, a craft beverage brand working with small farms to transform ugly produce into award-winning vegetable juices. Prior to Back Pocket, Will was a Program Officer at the Wallace Center in Arlington, VA, a national nonprofit working to make the food system more healthy, green, fair, and affordable.

Riley Piva

Program Analyst at DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (DC HSEMA)

Riley Piva is a Program Analyst on the Resilience Bureau at DC HSEMA. Riley's interdisciplinary position allows her to strategically support the Bureau's programs by integrating workflows to strengthen community resilience with best available data and engagement practices. Riley has been at HSEMA for 2 years, supporting the District's Food and Water Supply Chain Resilience Project since the beginning. During this time, she's worked on building data capabilities to support the National Capital Region's food supply chain while simultaneously bolstering engagement with private sector



food partners. Riley maintains the key to resilience is partnerships both with and amongst community members and organizations. Prior to HSEMA, she was an intern at the Metropolitan Area Planning Council on the Clean Energy Team. Riley holds a Master of Public Policy Degree and a Bachelor of Environmental Policy Degree from the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Ashley Drakeford

Co-Organizer and Chief Officer of Vibes, The Capital Market

Ashley is a lifelong resident and advocate of Prince George's County and a graduate of North Carolina A&T State University (B.A. in Cultural Thought). As a Co-Organizer, and the Chief Officer of Vibes of The Capital Market, Ashley "leads with love". By centering care, commitment, responsibility, respect, and trust as crucial components of community advocacy, Ashley is able to establish long-term connections with small farmers, businesses, and community members. Ashley serves as a Board Member of EndoBlack, a non-profit organization serving Black women with endometriosis, an Advisory Member for Creative Suitland, a project to enhance the local creative industry, and serves on various Agricultural committees throughout Prince George's County and the state of Maryland.

Nadine Burton

Owner, Tallawah Farms, Around the Bay Farmers' Alliance Inc.

Nadine Burton, PhD, a Jamaican native and a past student from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore where she currently serves as the Alternative Crop Specialist for UMES Extension is passionate about her work. She strongly believes that small farmers have a critical role to play in the improvement of food security and can contribute greatly to the local food system. As a result, she has dedicated her time imparting her knowledge and using her skillset to serve through multiple platforms in addition to her work at UMES. She is the owner of Tallawah Farms which was established as a pilot farm for growing specialty crops, she is also the director of the Around the Bay Farmers' Alliance inc. which offers supplemental support for small farmers. Food insecurity is what keeps Nadine up at night and she is adamant to play her part in making a change.

Brandon Starkes

Founder & CEO, The People's Market

Brandon Starkes, Founder of The People's Market, is a native of Prince George's County, Maryland. He grew up in Bowie and currently resides in Silver Spring, Maryland with his wife, Chaka, and son, Malcolm. Brandon started his career in public service, serving in DC and Prince George's County Government. In both roles, he quickly learned that having access to resources wasn't solely based on income, but that race and zip code also played an essential role in whether residents had access to fresh, organic, and all-natural food in their neighborhood. Driven by a vision to create a scalable marketplace, Brandon aims to sell fresh produce and small-batch, local products to consumers who have traditionally been left out of certain markets. His overarching goal is to enhance and invest in local economies, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase access to fresh, nutritionally dense food for local consumers, and provide a vibrant market for small farms and small businesses.

Alex Lewin-Zwerdling

Owner, Fruitful, LLC, on the Cold Storage Working Group

Alex Lewin-Zwerdling, PhD, MPA, is the Owner of Fruitful LLC, a food and nutrition business out of Washington, DC. Alex works with a number of NGOs, overseeing their Food is Medicine Work as well as Health Equity-Based Research, Communications and Public Affairs. She also works extensively on cold storage through her work with The Morningstar Foundation, a family foundation based in Bethesda Maryland. Prior to Fruitful, Alex had roles with AARP Foundation, The Pew Charitable



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Trusts, USDA and CSPI. She remains involved in many aspects of DC's food system as well as national healthy equity movements via her work with The Root Cause Coalition and The Aspen Institute's Food & Society Program.

Madelyn Smith

Executive Director, Common Grain Alliance

Madelyn Smith is the Executive Director of Common Grain Alliance (CGA), a nonprofit that connects grain producers, processors, and grain artisans to build a more regenerative, integrated, and equitable regional grain economy in the Mid-Atlantic region. CGA's 120+ members are grain farmers, millers, maltsters, bakers, brewers, distillers, food systems advocates, and others who are committed to working collaboratively to integrate grains and other staple food crops into local food systems. Madelyn works on solutions to coordinate the regional grain value chain, expand access to locally grown, whole grain foods, provide technical assistance to grain growers and processors, and address supply chain challenges.

Reasonable accommodations are provided upon request, including alternative formats of meeting materials.
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