

2017 Network Health Assessment

## **Summary of Results**



## Introduction & Highlights

Food Solutions New England (FSNE) is a regional collaborative network organized to support the emergence and viability of a New England food system that is a driver of healthy food for all, racial equity, sustainable farming and fishing, and thriving communities. Food Solutions New England was launched in response to a shared sense that greater connection and trust was needed across food system efforts and innovations, and began with our inaugural New England Food Summit in 2011. We have been working since then to develop connectivity and alignment around a long-term food system vision built upon shared values of racial equity and food justice across the entire value chain and system, public health, and ecological integrity in New England.

The 2017 Network Health Assessment was developed to help FSNE organizers better understand network participation and impacts. Survey results will help to improve FSNE so that it better serves individuals, organization, and the regional food system. Major findings and recommendations of the survey are highlighted below, followed by a full summary of the results.

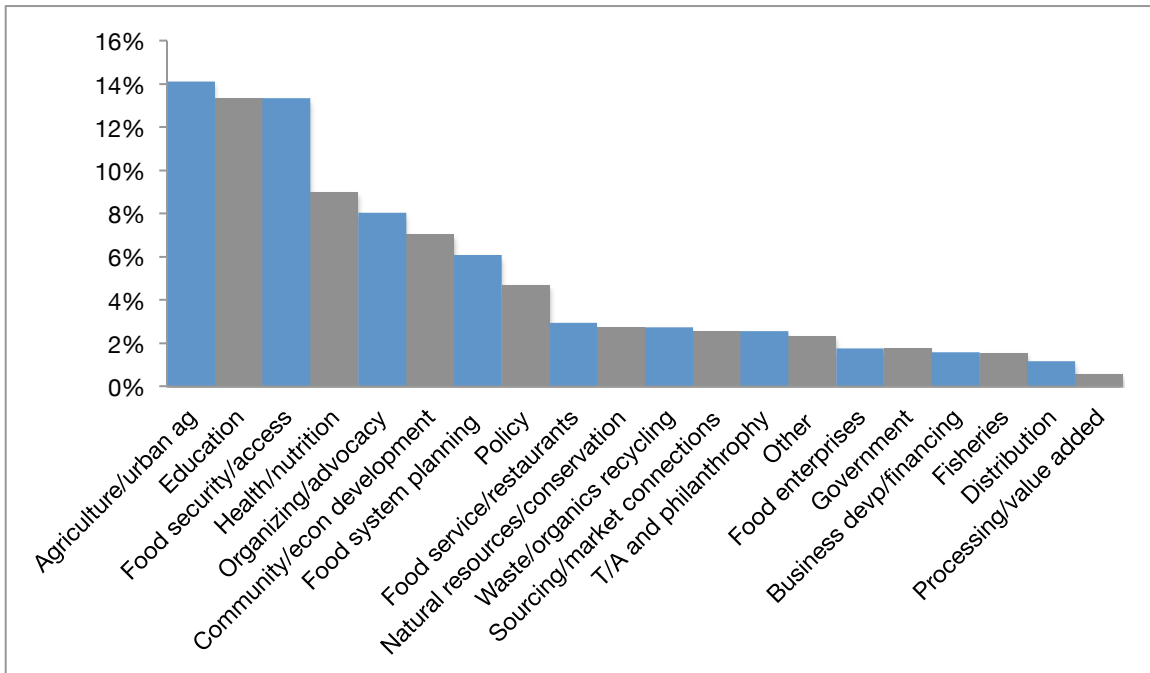
<i>Findings</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
<p><b>1. Respondents were most representative of agriculture and urban agriculture, education, and health and nutrition, while sectors such as food enterprises, business development and financing, processing and value added, and distribution, were poorly represented. In addition, representation from a major area of the food system—fisheries—was poorly represented.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increase efforts to expand network participation among representatives from fisheries</li> <li>➤ Increase efforts to engage more value-chain actors and entrepreneurs</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Respondents appreciated learning and sharing opportunities, both virtual and face-to-face, including the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge, blogs, stories, newsletters, and social media. Respondents would like to see increased communication and education efforts, as well as opportunities for networking, learning, and sharing.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Prioritize communications and education, focused especially around providing a regional food system and racial equity/food justice perspectives</li> <li>➤ Facilitate networking opportunities, particularly those that are solution-oriented and foster learning and information sharing</li> </ul>

<p><b>3. Many respondents expressed appreciation for the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge and noted that FSNE’s commitment to racial equity in the food system has impacted the way they think about and conduct their food system work.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increase network weaving and leadership development opportunities (such as the FSNE Network Leadership Institute), particularly in communities of color</li> <li>➤ Continue offering the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge and/or related learning opportunities, especially those aimed at dismantling white supremacy</li> <li>➤ Continue and seek additional support for the FSNE Racial Equity Ambassadors, especially in the northern states.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Respondents benefited from applying a regional food system lens to their food system planning work at the state/local level.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increase availability of a regional food system perspective among state and local advocates through communications, including stories and social media</li> <li>➤ Facilitate opportunities for face-to-face networking and sharing across states</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. The FSNE Vision and values are generally viewed favorably. Respondents are using the Vision in a variety of ways. Some seek next steps to actualize the Vision, including outreach, tools, and actions.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Develop educational/training toolkits, facilitate practical problem solving on obstacles to achieving the Vision, and conduct research in support of advancing the Vision and values</li> </ul>

## Survey Participation

A total of 214 people from sectors across the food system completed the survey. Three sector areas were most highly represented: agriculture, including urban agriculture (14%); education, formal and informal (13%); and food security/access (13%). Least represented sector areas included distribution and processing/value added (both fewer than 2%).

### Respondent Sectors



Nearly half (49%) of respondents had been involved in food system work for 6 or fewer years. Twenty-three percent (23%) reported being involved in food system work for 7 to 10 years, 14% between 11 and 15 years, and the remaining 12% reported 16 or more years (including some reporting upwards of 35 or more years working in the food system).

Half the respondents reported to be in their 20s or 30s (22% and 28%, respectively); the remaining half of respondents distributed among 40s, 50s, 60s, and 70s (15%, 17%, 13%, and 5%, respectively).

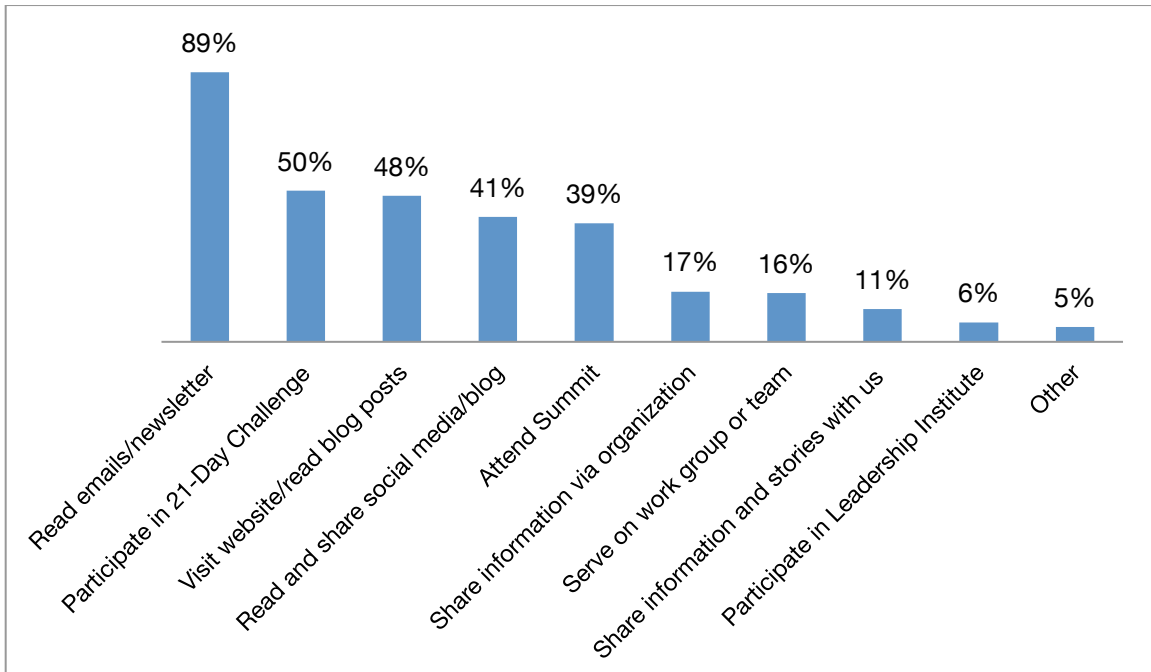
The majority of respondents identified as white, including Middle Eastern (89%); fewer than 4% from each of all other racial and ethnic categories were represented.

Three-quarters of respondents identified as female, including cis-female and she/her. The remaining quarter identified as male.

## Network Participation

Individuals participate in networks in a variety of ways. The table below shows how respondents reported their past and/or present participation in the FSNE network.

### Pathways to Participation



More than half of the respondents reported being in touch with other people or organizations involved with FSNE on a daily or weekly basis (53%), while 31% reported being in touch a few times a year and 15% said they were never in touch with others in the FSNE network.

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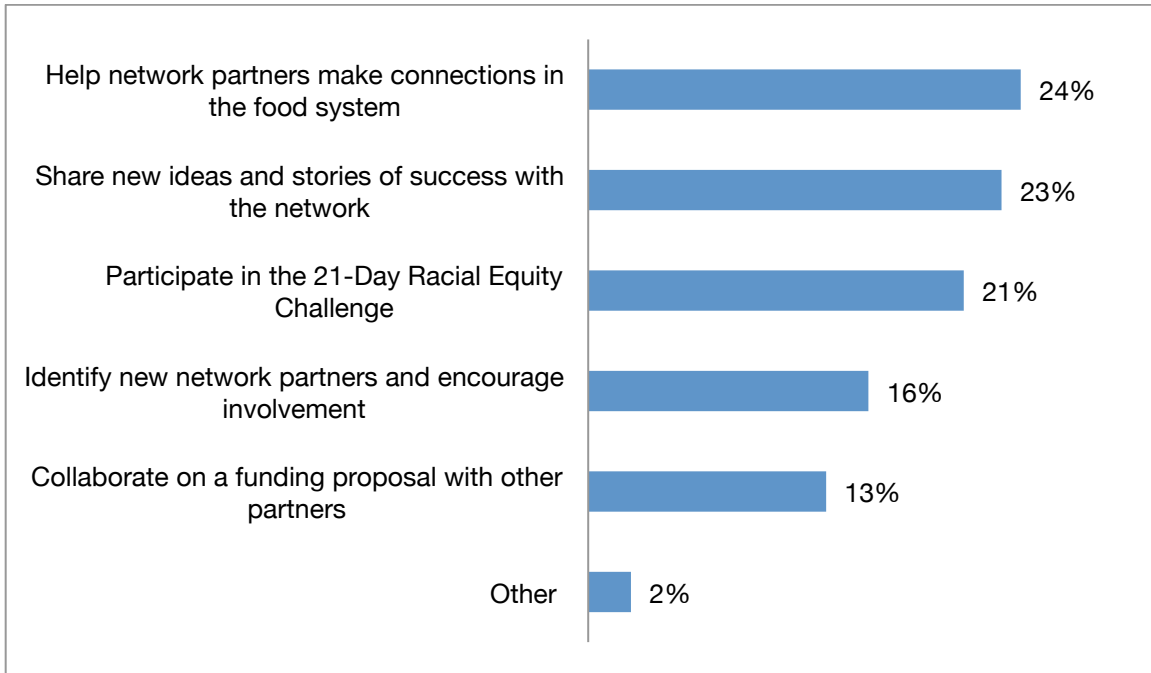
*“I participated in the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge and shared it with everyone in my organization. It has helped bring conversations about race and intersectionality to the forefront of our discussions about the food system. We’ve continued our efforts and are hosting a racial equity training at our offices this fall.”*

Anonymous Survey Respondent

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Over 90% of respondents saw their work in the food system as contributing to the FSNE network. The table below depicts how respondents reported that they or their organization could help advance the FSNE network.

### Contributing to the Network



In addition to supporting the network, respondents provided feedback for how the FSNE network could better support their work. Suggestions for improving network function include:

- Increase communication, outreach, and education around issues
- Increase network weaving across state lines and sectors, including expanding diversity of the network
- Provide tools and technical assistance for talking about issues of race and class in the food system, *A New England Food Vision*, state/local issues, and funding opportunities
- Facilitate conversations and collaborations, including issue-related gatherings across New England and opportunities for learning and sharing information and ideas
- Clearly define the FSNE network and increase pathways for engagement

## Network Benefits

Opportunities for learning and information exchange ranked highest among the perceived network benefits of Food Solutions New England (18%). Gaining a regional and/or systems level perspective and developing solutions and ideas to address issues were also high on the list (13% and 12%, respectively). Less benefit was seen in the network's ability to mobilize more people for action (4%) and in strengthening political voice (3%).

### Benefits to Network Participation



The findings show that the majority of respondents saw value in connecting with the FSNE network (50% strongly agree, 41% somewhat agree), yet also reveal that more could be done to strengthen relationship building among individuals and organizations, use individual and organizational contributions and skills more effectively, and improve overall network transparency and accountability.

Ways in which the FSNE network has affected respondents' work include:

- Gaining a regional/broadened perspective on the food system
- Connecting to New England state-level food system work
- Promoting conversations about race and equity in the food system
- Expanding networks and awareness of what is happening across the region
- Building new partnerships and opportunities for collaboration

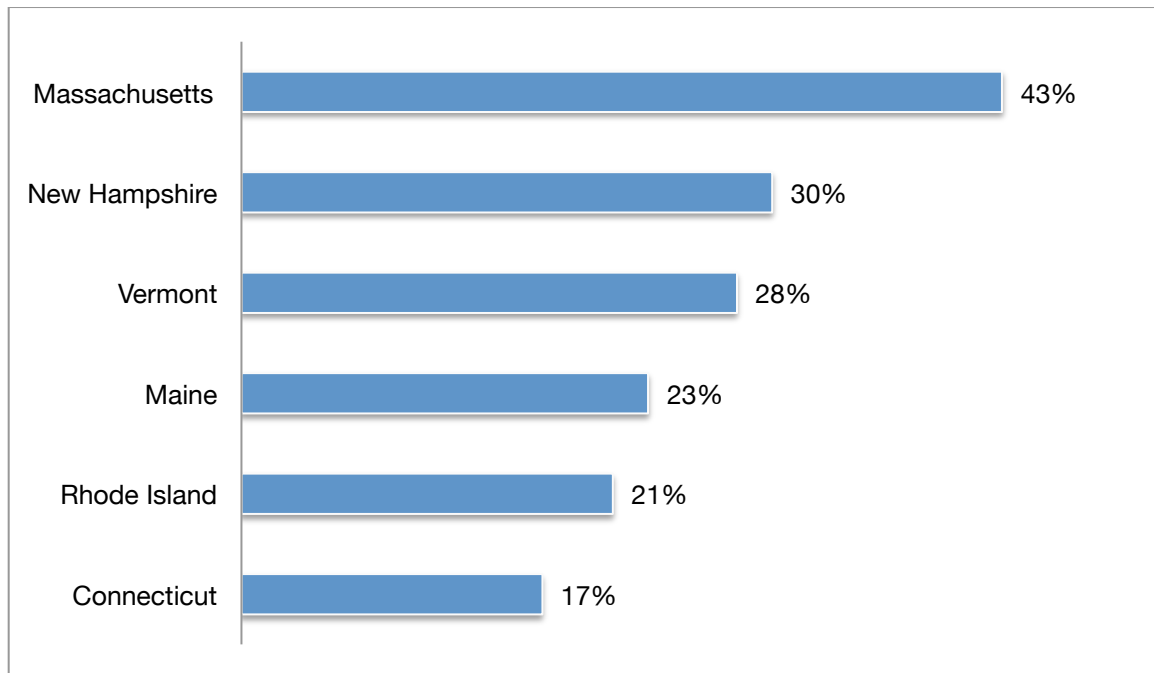
## State Planning Linkages

Part of FSNE's role is to highlight state-based food system planning work happening in New England. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of respondents were aware of or engaged in state-based food system planning.

The depth of knowledge of and involvement in state-based food system planning efforts varied widely across the pool of respondents, ranging from basic awareness that these activities are happening to active participation on state planning committees and working teams.

The chart below shows how aware respondents were to each state food planning efforts.

### Awareness of State Food System Planning



*“The Food Vision and the FSNE network are the basis for state level work we are undertaking, with an explicit goal of alignment with the vision.”*

Anonymous Survey Respondent

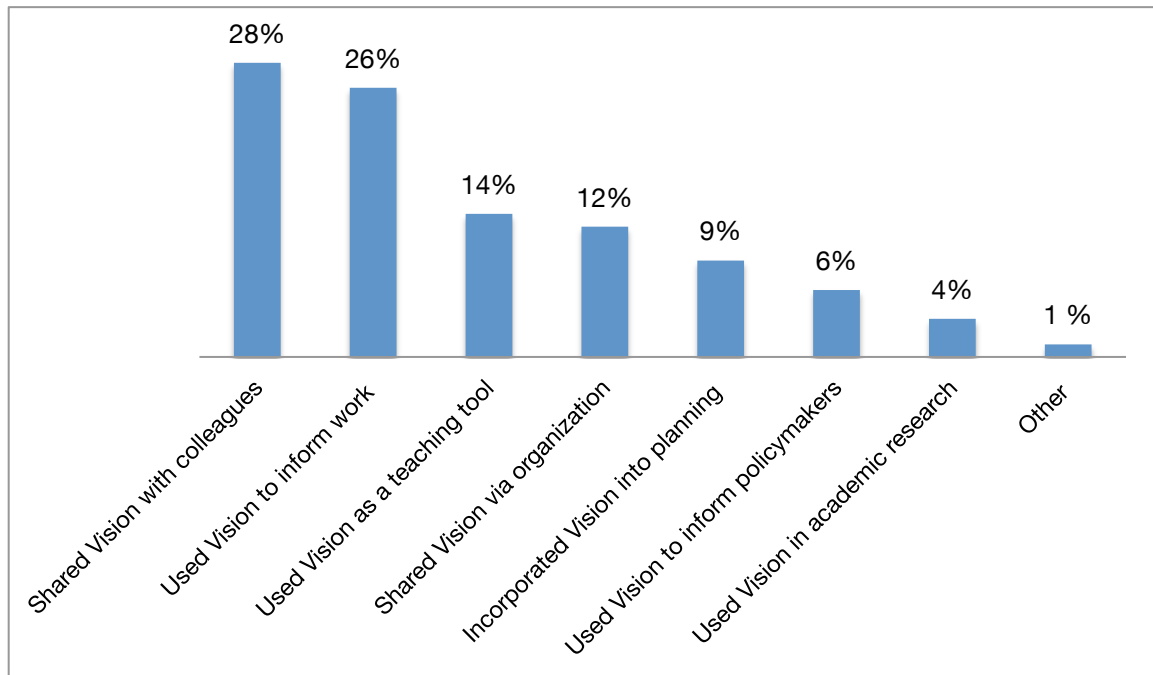


## Regional Alignment

Food Solutions New England has been working to promote a shared vision and values for the region. *A New England Food Vision*, published in 2014, put forth a vision of the region producing 50% of its food in New England for New Englanders by the year 2060. Seventy-three percent (73%) of respondents reported that they were familiar with the Vision.

The most common ways respondents reported sharing or utilizing the *Vision* was by sharing it with colleagues (28%) and using the *Vision* to inform the work of their organization/community/networks (26%).

### How Respondents are Using A New England Food Vision



Specific ways that the *Vision* has been used include:

#### Providing context and information

- In grant-seeking, reports, & articles
- For community and state-based planning efforts
- For organizations to understand /frame their role in the region
- For organizational goal and priority setting

#### Providing education and inspiration

- In university courses
- In community settings
- To influence decision-makers
- To inspire community members

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*“I have used the Vision to provide a context and a justification for efforts to secure the long term viability and expansion of agriculture in my home state. I am using the Vision to as a strategy to decrease greenhouse gas emissions from the food sector and thereby contribute to meeting goals established in state law for green house gas emissions: you can't get to those goals through the dominant food system.”*

Anonymous Survey Respondent

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Food Solutions New England has articulated four values to guide our network. They are:

**1. Democratic Empowerment**

We celebrate and value the political power of the people. A just food system depends on the active participation of all people in New England.

**2. Racial Equity and Dignity for All**

We believe that racism must be undone in order to achieve an equitable food system. Fairness, inclusiveness, and solidarity must guide our food future.

**3. Sustainability**

We know that our food system is interconnected with the health of our environment, our democracy, and our economy. Sustainability commits us to ensure well-being for people and the planet now and in the future.

**4. Trust**

We consider trust to be the lifeblood of collaboration and collaboration is key to our long-term success. We are committed to building trust across diverse people, organizations, networks, and communities to support a thriving food system.

The vast majority of respondents reported that these values were very aligned or aligned with those of their work or organization (87%). Fewer than 2% reported that their work or organizations were not aligned with these values.

Food Solutions New England is a regional network coordinated by:



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