

KATAL

CENTER FOR EQUITY, HEALTH, & JUSTICE

BIG NEWS FROM KATAL'S CO-PRESIDENTS **Lorenzo Jones & gabriel sayegh**

February 2025

As Katal approaches its 10th anniversary, we are writing to share exciting news with you.

We founded Katal in the summer of 2015 and publicly launched in February 2016. Katal's work has always centered the power of organizing people to take collective action to catalyze systemic change rooted in equity, health, and justice. Our foundational creed is that organized people will always beat organized money – which is why organized money is always working to *disorganize* people.

Over the past decade, we've trained thousands of people in the art and science of community organizing. We've built and won major campaigns. We've provided strategic guidance to organizations, networks, and coalitions. We've collaborated with partners to create new local and national projects, including Cultivating Justice, which has steadily grown since its launch in 2022. We've published a wide range of reports and tools that people throughout the movement *actually* use. We've shaped and driven the passage of some of the biggest criminal justice reform measures in the country, cutting jail and prison populations – resulting in far fewer people behind bars and on community supervision – and shutting down some of these facilities altogether. We've fought for investments in real community safety, like housing, health care, education, and jobs. And more.

We are moving into a new phase that builds on this decade of work.



We're thrilled to share that Katal's Cultivating Justice project is spinning off and will be housed at Chicks Ahoy Farm, a new nonprofit in Connecticut led by Lorenzo Jones.

We know from our organizing that the social safety net often fails people impacted by the system of mass criminalization and incarceration. They struggle with issues of survival like food insecurity and lack of economic mobility. Through Cultivating Justice, we have been working to increase the number of farmers who are Black, Indigenous, Latine, and People of Color (BILPOC). We've been working with people who have fixed and low incomes, to create new pathways for economic independence through farming. Cultivating Justice doesn't just train new BILPOC farmers; it is prepared to become an economic development engine – and it needs room to grow. The detailed summary below describes the project's origins and trajectory – and makes clear that it's time for Cultivating Justice to leave its Katal nest.

Chicks Ahoy Farm, Inc. (CAF) is a stand-alone nonprofit that came directly out of work with Cultivating Justice members. Founded as an all-volunteer effort, CAF created the additional organizational structure needed for Cultivating Justice to grow. Through CAF, Cultivating Justice will pursue opportunities for support and resources that are unavailable to nonagricultural groups like Katal. And new opportunities have emerged – the direct result of the organizing by Cultivating Justice members and partners: The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Connecticut Department of Agriculture recently announced a new program "to train historically disadvantaged farmers and increase land access." Not only does this new initiative reflect demands made by Cultivating Justice, it sounds quite similar to the mission of CAF: increasing BILPOC participation in Connecticut's agricultural industry and representation in the USDA census every five years.

Chicks Ahoy Farm is transforming from an all-volunteer group to a funded organization with full-time staff. Lorenzo will lead the nonprofit as director while continuing to serve as co-president of Katal's board. Diana Martinez, Katal's project manager for Cultivating Justice, will also move to CAF. The spin-off is underway and will be complete by April 1st. Chicks Ahoy Farm and Katal will move forward as organizational partners, with our next collaborative event set for March 9 in Hartford: Growing Power '25.



Katal will continue our state-based organizing and will expand our BLOC program nationally.

We'll keep doing base-building organizing with our members in Connecticut and New York, including our #CutShutInvestCT work on probation reform and our #ShutRikers campaign. gabriel will continue as Katal's director and board co-president.

With the bandwidth freed up by this change, he will focus on leading the expansion of our Building Leadership and Organizing Capacity (BLOC) program, supporting people around the country in building power in this time of historic upheaval.

We are excited about our evolution.

The two of us have worked together for more than 20 years. We founded Katal together and have led it together for nearly a decade, establishing an unparalleled track record of success that includes nurturing and building Cultivating Justice.

Over the past two years, the Cultivating Justice project has developed its organizing strategy to include multigenerational participation, interdisciplinary learning, workforce development for young people, and for-profit business trajectories for people who are being disenfranchised. Cultivating Justice has devised an action-based strategy for food justice – and the people leading it are those directly impacted by the criminal legal system and failed social safety net. This work will deepen and expand as it moves to Chicks Ahoy Farm. It has long been a dream of Lorenzo's to lead land-based work, and we could not be prouder that Katal can help make that happen. You can read more about Cultivating Justice and its trajectory below.



BOTH KATAL AND CHICKS AHOY NEED YOUR SUPPORT.

We believe both organizations will be stronger and better positioned to make the maximum impact possible. And we are clear-eyed as we make this long-planned change during enormous uncertainty for our country and our movement. Chicks Ahoy Farm will be new and Katal will be leaner – and neither will make it without you in our corner. Please consider joining gabriel as a monthly donor to Chicks Ahoy and Lorenzo as a monthly donor to Katal.

Our collaboration continues as Katal's board co-presidents and as organizational partners. For both of us, this work has always been our form of ministry. We move forward with an abiding belief in the power of organized people to make the world a more equitable, healthier, and more just place for us all.

Lorenzo Jones

gabriel sayegh

www.chicksahoyfarm.org

www.katalcenter.org



THE STORY OF CULTIVATING JUSTICE

February 2025

In early 2021, Katal launched its #CutShutInvestCT campaign and fought to prevent the reopening of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS), a youth prison near Middletown. That year, Lorenzo was exploring his family tree, among them ancestors who farmed in Alabama and moved north to Chicago during the Great Migration. He decided to carry on that tradition and set out to raise chickens in his backyard. In the process, he experienced firsthand the entrenched racism in Connecticut's agricultural industry.

Although more than 35 percent of the state's residents are people of color, approximately 98 percent of the registered farmers in Connecticut are white. This gross disparity has deep roots, including the country's history of slavery; 100 years of Jim Crow segregation, followed by mass criminalization and mass incarceration; and staggering economic inequality across generations. Indeed, Connecticut is one of the nation's most racially and economically segregated states.

As Katal continued our fight to prevent the reopening of CJTS to detain migrants (and to shut down the facility altogether), Lorenzo launched a one-on-one project, meeting people across Connecticut, most of whom had been impacted by criminalization and incarceration, and many of whom had farming in their family history. As these one-on-ones continued through 2022, major themes emerged, related to the impact of criminalization and systemic poverty – including food insecurity and the need for economic development in BILPOC communities.

Lorenzo worked with Katal leaders, including Diana Martinez of Middletown, to expand the list of people to meet with and include more BILPOC farmers and agricultural officials. Diana had joined Katal in the fight against CJTS and is a farmer who owns the agribusiness Dees Crafty Bees.



@cultivatingjusticect

With Diana's participation, Lorenzo completed more than 100 one-on-ones by the end of 2022. And they'd met with staff from state and federal agricultural agencies, university agricultural departments, agribusinesses, state-run agricultural not-for-profits, and others to discuss how to increase the number of BILPOC farmers in Connecticut, particularly among people affected by mass criminalization. They convened a community visioning process with Katal members and partners to explore these issues and create action plans. This process led to the founding of Cultivating Justice – a group with intergenerational majority-BILPOC membership from nearly 35 urban, suburban, and rural municipalities across the state. At the same time, Katal was completing its research about the impact of probation and parole in Connecticut for an upcoming campaign, which included Katal members who were involved with Cultivating Justice.

In February 2023, Cultivating Justice held its first Growing Power convening, in Middletown, with a program connecting these issues. Over 200 people from across the state participated in the daylong gathering.

In May 2023, Katal reached two major milestones: First, members of the Cultivating Justice leadership team – mostly people impacted by mass criminalization – held a meeting with the executive director of the USDA Farm service agency in Connecticut to demand programs that include agribusiness development and support for BILPOC folks. Organizing and holding this meeting expedited the plans by Cultivating Justice members and our Farmers & Leaders of Color (FLOC) cohort to establish an all-volunteer organizational structure devoted exclusively to agriculture: Chicks Ahoy Farm, Inc.

Second, with our partners at Prison Policy Initiative, we released a new report, Excessive, Injustice, and Expensive: Fixing Connecticut's Probation and Parole Problems. The report set the stage for tackling the explosive growth in the state's use of probation – a problem disproportionately impacting low-income communities, including members of our Cultivating Justice project.



These milestones laid the foundation for our work over the next two years, work we're building on today.

Here's a summary of Cultivating Justice's achievements in that time:

- Added 16 acres of conservation and farming land to its agricultural education and farmwork, along with 14 acres of conservation and agricultural land in Bloomfield and 20+ acres across Hartford, Windham, Middlesex, and New Haven Counties for urban and suburban folks. This means the project has so far assisted BILPOC farmers in securing more than 40 acres of land for agriculture, conservation, and related activities.
- Provided civic engagement trainings to more than 350 participants, directly connecting our BLOC program to Cultivating Justice, helping residents change city ordinances to expand farming access for locals.
- Launched FLOC, a leadership curriculum of entrepreneurial training, farm practice, and agribusiness support for BILPOC farmers; more than 20 new BILPOC farmers have completed the curriculum.
- Opened an office in Middletown, to have enough space for the growing membership base.
- Hosted two successful Growing Power convenings with hundreds of participants from across the state, most recently in February 2024.
- Launched the Miller Street Community Farm in Middletown.
- Launched Pathways2Agriculture (P2A), which provides internships and college mentors to people 15 to 19 years old.
- Hosted annual fall convenings called Harvesting Change, in 2023 and 2024, with dozens of families joining for food, fellowship, and training. The Connecticut Mirror published our op-ed about the convening in 2024.
- Launched Supporting Women-Identified Farmers (SWIF), a working group of seven women and girls who had recently started on a path as beekeepers, growers, scientists, farmers, and composters.

This is only the beginning. As Chicks Ahoy Farm evolves into an organization with full-time staff – housing Cultivating Justice as it spins off from Katal – we are ready and excited for what's ahead this year and beyond.