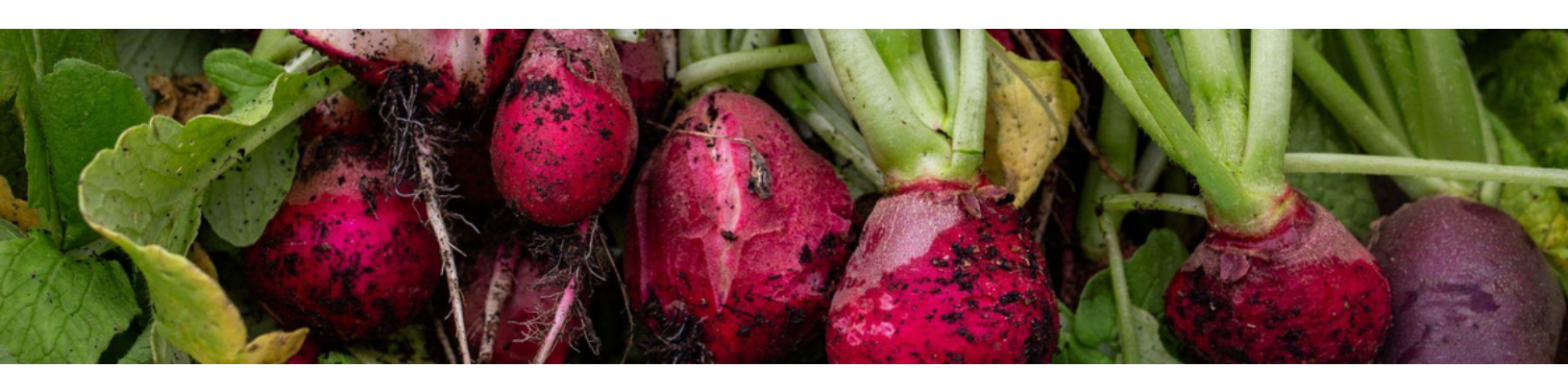




2024 ANNUAL REPORT



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Living Roots!



Dear Friends of RAFI,

This past year has been one of both deep challenges and deep connections. It's also been a time of transition and reflection, as it was also the beginning of my transition from the Executive Director role at RAFI. It's been an honor to serve this organization. Through every crisis and quiet victory, I've watched this team show up with heart, skill, and an unwavering belief in and commitment to the farmers and communities we serve.

2024 tested us in so many ways. Hurricane Helene tore through our home state of North Carolina just as our staff were gathering for the Come to the Table conference. It was devastating. But even in the face of so much loss, our team moved quickly, coordinating relief efforts, helping farmers navigate government disaster programs, and staying rooted in care and community. This kind of response isn't new for RAFI, it's who we are.

Despite the challenges faced, our team supported more farmers, built new partnerships, advocated for better policies, and brought community members together to share stories, resources, knowledge, and hope.

To our funders and friends, thank you for standing with us. To our brilliant staff and board, you've inspired me every day. All of you are the reason RAFI is recognized as an anchor organization within the sustainable agriculture movement, a clarion advocate for the inclusion of the most underrepresented communities, and a trusted partner to many small- and mid-scale farmers.

With gratitude,

Edna Rodriguez, Executive Director



Climate Disasters & RAFI's Response

In states in the Southeast U.S., farmers endured a prolonged drought followed by widespread flooding from Hurricane Debby. Tropical Storm Ernesto wiped out much of Puerto Rico's plantain, banana, and coffee crops. And then Hurricane Helene devastated tens of thousands of farms from the Florida Panhandle to the Southern Appalachians, a region that had been previously regarded as a "climate haven." And then came Hurricane Milton. Each of these climate-related disasters impacted the farmers RAFI serves and in each case, RAFI responded with assistance. And what our staff and farmers experienced informed our policy development and advocacy.



Hurricane Helene caused soil erosion.

Responding in Puerto Rico



Jehyra Asencio Yace shows her appreciation for the farmer brigade on her coffee farm.

Hurricane Ernesto swept over PR in August, causing widespread damage to farms. RAFI's PR Farmer Resources Coordinator, Fello Pérez, worked with farmers and partners on the ground to identify those in need of assistance and then coordinated brigades to provide support. Over two months, brigades worked on 7 farms, clearing roads, removing fallen trees and vegetative debris obstructing crop development, repairing broken fences, and replanting fields. The brigades helped foster a sense of community and camaraderie.

BY THE NUMBERS

200+

Farmers contacted to assess needs and first steps counsel

71

Farmers received \$599 emergency relief payments: Part 1

50+

Farmers received in-depth technical assistance to help with applying for federal assistance

\$225,000 raised for hurricane response from 9 foundations & 200+ individuals.

Climate Disasters & RAFI's Response

(continued)

Helene swept through North Carolina the weekend RAFI's biennial Come to the Table conference began in eastern NC, where most of our staff were gathered. We immediately began coordinating a multi-pronged response. Our technical assistance staff reached out to farmers and took calls from our Farmer Crisis Hotline. Policy staff connected with the USDA about disaster aid. And we launched our communications and fundraising efforts.

Throughout the fall and winter, RAFI's disaster working group coordinated our efforts. We established consistent communication with Western NC serving partner organizations, created an online hub with multi-lingual resources and a curated list of assistance programs for farmers, and the technical assistance team helped guide farmers through the process of applying for federal relief. Additionally, the generous support of foundation partners and hundreds of individuals enabled RAFI to begin distributing emergency relief payments quickly. Knowing that it would be months before many farmers could fully assess their needs and plan for recovery and rebuilding, RAFI began planning our Phase 2 rebuilding efforts to continue support well into 2025.



"In normal times, it's hard enough to understand federal financial assistance programs, but after a devastating disaster that destroyed almost everything you produce and your infrastructure, understanding these programs is like ten times harder."

Jamie McGirt, RAFI staff



(Top left clockwise) Mutual Aid efforts in WNC; Helping provide supplies to impacted farmworkers on Christmas tree farms in WNC; RAFI staff members discuss response actions needed for Hurricane Helene-impacted farmers during the CTTT Conference.

Come to the Table Biennial Conference



On September 30 and October 1, RAFI brought together farmers, educators, land stewards, and food system advocates for its biennial Come to the Table Conference at The Impact Center in Rocky Mount, NC. This year's theme was Food, Land & Sacred Stories. We had 350 attendees, despite some having to cancel due to Hurricane Helene. This was our first in-person conference in 5 years!

The conference featured workshops, panel discussions, a “power hour” topical learning session, and a farmers market. Two evening events were held – a trivia night for early birds and a storytelling hour featuring six unique sacred stories. Our opening keynote speaker was Dr. Gail Myers, co-founder of Farms to Grow, Inc., and director of the film “Rhythms of the Land.” She emphasized the stories of Black farmers and urged her listeners to remember their strength and resilience. Our closing keynote speaker, A-dae Romero Briones, Director of Programs for the First Nations Development Institute, was joined by Fred and Elsie DuBray for a meaningful conversation about the stories we hold onto, our oldest teachers, and what the buffalo can teach us about our humanity and connection to the land.

BY THE NUMBERS



Do you feel more equipped to engage in challenges within the food system?

98% YES



82.5%

rated individual workshops as excellent



34

32 Workshops

20 Exhibitors

Attendees from **17** States, DC & USVI

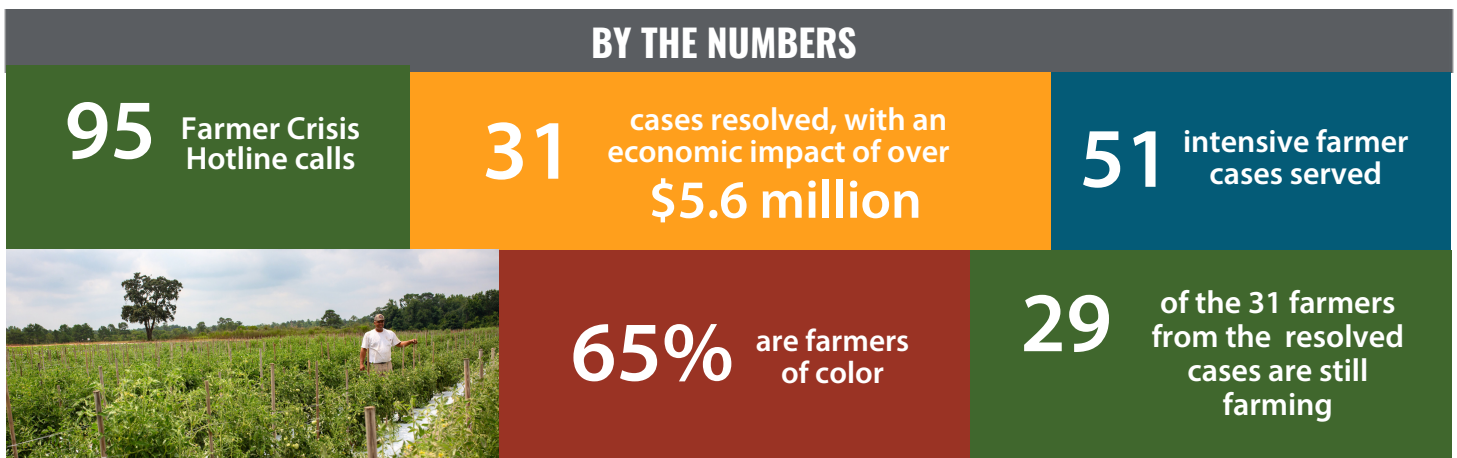


“Bringing together farmers, educators, land stewards, other people in the food systems is important and stands out from conferences just focused on one of those groups. Solutions to injustices will take whole communities, and y'all are facilitating conversations that lead to those solutions.”

Farm Advocacy

For more than 20 years, RAFI's Farmer Advocates have shared their expertise to help save or strengthen farms and keep family farmers on their land. This free service supports diverse farms across the Southeast, from small specialty operations to livestock and commodity operations on thousands of acres. We also operate a national crisis hotline for farmers in need of immediate help. RAFI's policy efforts are informed by our farm advocacy casework.

In 2024, RAFI launched a USDA/FSA Distressed Borrower Technical Assistance Cooperative Agreement project (DBAN) in partnership with Farm Aid, FLAG, and the University of Arkansas. The three-year DBAN project aims to meet the critical need for trained farmer advocates by developing a comprehensive training curriculum, piloting the recruitment and training of a new cohort of farmer advocates, and establishing a National Farm Advocate Network.



*A farmer can have more than one Farm Advocacy case.

Just Foods

RAFI's Just Foods program has focused on regionally adapted seed work, supporting small- and mid-scale farmers. This initiative aims to diversify farm production and market opportunities while enhancing ecological assets for future generations. Our current projects include the Southern Farmers Seed Cooperative and NC Seed Stewards.

- Southern Farmers Seed Coop sold 440 bushels of 4 varieties of organic soybeans seed.
- 60 acres of 3 varieties of soybeans were inspected and harvested.
- NC Seed Stewards harvested 2 varieties of wildflower seed.



Harvested seed from Eastern bearded tongue.

Farmers of Color Network



RAFI ED Edna Rodriguez presents the seeder to winner Alissia Matthews of Kidogo Farms, SC

RAFI's Farmers of Color Network (FOCN) continued its steady growth, especially in Puerto Rico. FOCN conducted surveys of members and past grantees to better understand the needs of its members and used the results in program planning. We revitalized the FOCN Facebook group, where members receive timely information but also build community through engaging with one another. Other community-building activities included hosting brigades stateside and in PR and hosting a FOCN Member Gathering alongside the CTTT Conference. The member gathering featured workshops, including "Farming as a Family" and "Telling Your Own Story via Social Media," as well as networking opportunities and a grand prize giveaway of a Jang JP-1 Seeder, donated by Johnny's Selected Seeds.

RAFI has long assisted producers with acquiring new markets for their products. Selling to a restaurant, a wholesaler, or a farmers market can be important to growing or stabilizing their farm businesses. A FOCN Farmer-Buyer Connect event was held at Mystic Distillery in Durham in February 2024, bringing together 11 buyers and 9 farmers for developing business relationships.



"I made at least three very promising connections with buyers," said one farmer attendee.

BY THE NUMBERS

120 attendees at 4 webinars

70 participated in 3 in-person events

17 received capacity building stipends



RAFI 2024 Regranting

RAFI raises funds so that we can provide small- and mid-scale producers with non-extractive grants for on-farm infrastructure projects and to beginning farmers (3 years or less) to help reduce the financial barriers for start-up. Our aim is to help farmers expand access to new markets, improve farm viability and income, and implement sustainable practices. In addition to emergency relief payments to farmers affected by hurricanes, RAFI completed the 2024 cycle of regranting to farmers and rural churches for purchasing from local farmers of color.

BY THE NUMBERS

16

Beginning Farmers

\$336,539
total awarded

18

Caribbean Infrastructure

15

Mainland Infrastructure

7

Rural United Methodist Churches

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

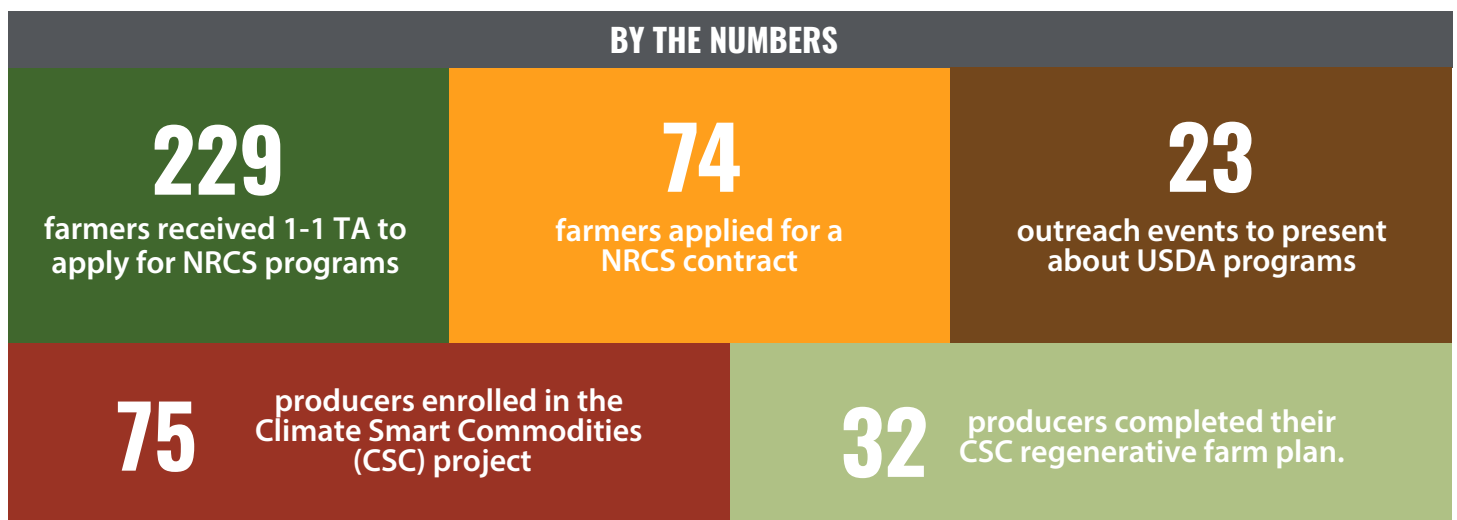


Billy Gibbons owns and operates Billy Gibbons Farm in Prattville, Alabama. He offers fresh, year-round produce and manages a 60-head cattle ranch. Billy has run the family farm for 50 years, continuing the legacy after his father's passing. Established in 1940, the farm adopted organic and regenerative farming practices, transitioning to grass-fed production. The RAFI grant helped purchase a new cooler, a crucial step toward achieving a decade-long goal of establishing a grass-fed beef processing facility.

"This was a wonderful opportunity to breathe new life into our farm and create more to leave for our kids and grandkids who will one day take over the farm."

Resources for Resilient Farms

Many USDA programs and funding opportunities are available to help farmers develop or grow their operations. However, historically, these resources have been tailored primarily for large-scale, commodity farmers, making them less accessible to all farmers. This is especially true for farmers who produce on small- to mid-scale farms, grow specialty crops, or are beginning farmers or farmers of color. In 2024, RAFI continued to focus on supporting farmers of color in accessing these programs through NRCS and FSA cooperative agreements. We saw a growing enthusiasm from farmers to shift from traditional practices to implementing regenerative and climate-smart practices. We provided intensive one-on-one technical assistance and educational resources to support them.



Policy

In 2024, RAFI was able to grow its policy team to 4 full-time staff, adding a new Challenging Corporate Power Project Manager and a new position, Grassroots Engagement Manager. This increased capacity enhances our ability to level the playing field for smaller, diversified farms, while challenging the power of extractive corporations.

As the year progressed, it became increasingly clear that the gridlock in Congress would prevent them from considering the Farm Bill in 2024. RAFI continued building key relationships with decision-makers and advocating for the change we are committed to.

Policy (continued)

Policy staff played a key role in RAFI's response to Hurricane Helene by participating in numerous meetings with state and federal USDA staff to gain clarity for farmers and RAFI's technical assistance staff about the scope of USDA disaster programs. RAFI advocated for key waivers and modifications to those programs as well as for the inclusion of a more comprehensive supplemental disaster assistance package as a part of the year-end budget bill.

Some policy highlights include:

- In partnership with the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and the National Family Farm Coalition, RAFI led the Fair Credit for Farmers Act week of action in March.
- Three highly significant rulemakings emerged — including two Packers and Stockyards Act rules that would improve fairness for contract poultry producers, and one from FSA that enacts a number of lending reforms that RAFI has advocated for.
- The Climate and Equity Policy Project, engaging small BIPOC-led organizations in policy work, completed a third round of regranting, awarding over \$216,000 to 24 organizations. By welcoming 13 new grantees, the Climate & Equity Community expanded to 24 states and territories, now including AZ, CO, CT, Guam, HI, KS, OH, and TX.
- The Challenging Corporate Power project introduced the Grocery Gap Atlas, a new interactive mapping tool that visualizes data on corporate consolidation of the grocery industry and its inequitable impact on food access, especially in farming communities. The tool can be effective in both advocacy and narrative change work.

BY THE NUMBERS

37

advocacy
meetings with
Congressional
offices

24

advocacy
meetings with
Executive branch
policymakers

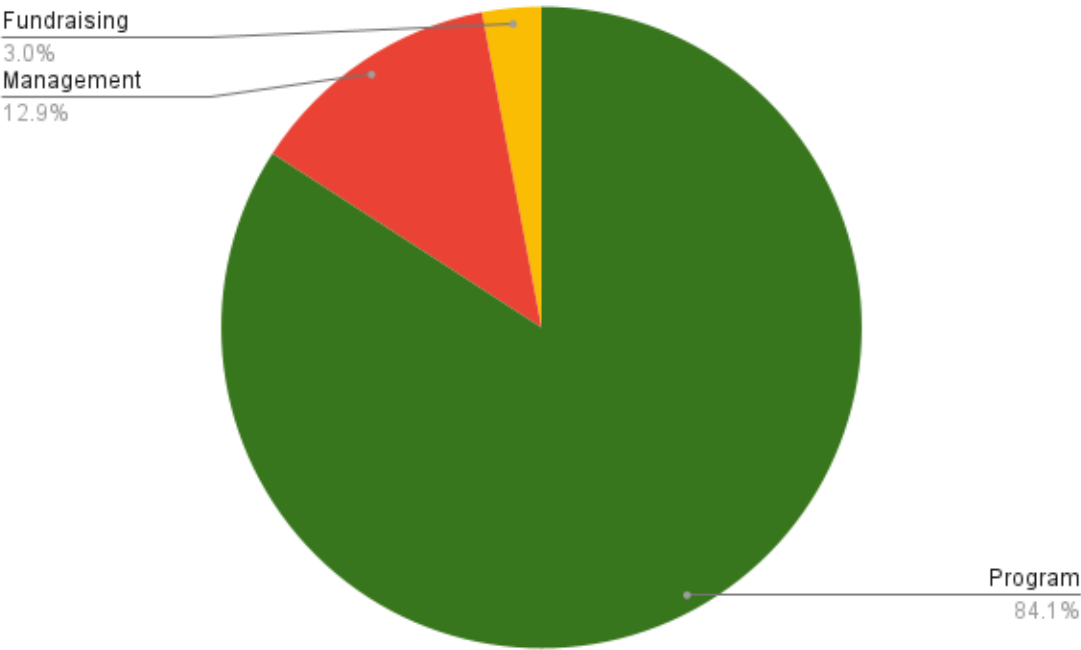
2,923

stakeholder
action alert emails
to Congress
offices

230

stakeholder
action alert
phone calls to
Congress
offices

FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES 2024



Thank you to our generous financial supporters!

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our generous financial supporters, who make RAFI's vital work possible. Our initiatives are funded by a diverse group of donors ranging from individuals, businesses, and faith communities. Their consistent support has contributed to RAFI's impressive 58% donor retention rate. We are also grateful to the more than 27 foundations and federal agencies and more than 21 Donor Advised Funds that have provided grants to RAFI.

RAFI is committed to transparency, ethical accounting, and responsible stewardship of donations. We are pleased to have earned the 2025 Platinum GuideStar Exchange Seal, and the ninth consecutive 4-star rating from Charity Navigator.



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