



RAFI 2025 Annual Report





Our Mission

RAFI challenges the root causes of unjust food systems, supporting and advocating for economically, racially, and ecologically just farm communities.

Our Vision

We envision a thriving and equitable food system where farming communities have dignity and agency; where they are supported by just policies; and where corporations and institutions are accountable to the communities they impact.

Our Values

- Relationships and Lived Experience
- Equity and Justice
- Empathy and Compassion
- Integrity and Accountability
- Collaboration

From RAFI's Board Chair

To RAFI's friends, supporters, and allies,

I have had the honor of serving on RAFI's board for nearly five years. In that time RAFI has deftly navigated many changes and challenges, but none quite as existential as we faced in 2025. Over the past year, RAFI board and staff facilitated an executive leadership transition while navigating a federal funding freeze that threatened not just RAFI's work and staff, but the broader food justice movement.

Like many organizations, losing federal funds meant losing critical and cherished staff as well as essential resources for farmers. Staff and board also said goodbye to an incredible leader when former Executive Director Edna Rodriguez left the organization in the fall (the result of a thoughtful transition, years in the making). Yet through these changes, RAFI's strategic and compassionate team focused on building a better future, both for the organization and the farmers and communities RAFI serves.

RAFI's new co-leadership model embodies the organization's core values of collaborative decision-making and accountability. The board was thrilled to hire two exceptional internal staff leaders, Kavita Koppa and Mo Murrie, to steward RAFI forward. Staff have also continued to meet the moment with responsive resources for farmers and long-term strategic policy engagement, figuring out how to meet farmers' needs and challenge the root causes of unjust food systems at the same time.

This annual report provides a snapshot of RAFI's incredible work delivering for farmers, sharing stories, promoting biodiversity, and advocating for policy change. RAFI couldn't do this work without the trust of farmers, collaboration of allies, and support of donors. We are so grateful to stand with you in our fight for economically, racially, and ecologically just farm communities.

In solidarity,

Chen Kellong

Claire Kelloway, Board Chair



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Transitions in 2025

Edna Rodriguez

With tremendous gratitude for her strategic vision, integrity, and determination, RAFI bid Edna Rodriguez farewell in October. Edna joined RAFI in 2011 and for the past seven years served as Executive Director. Under her leadership, we integrated racial equity and justice across all program areas, within internal policies, and procedures and governance. She introduced a distributed leadership model, increasing staff-led initiatives and collaboration through a robust team structure.

Through Edna's efforts, RAFI established itself as an anchor organization within the sustainable ag/food movement with a focus on shifting power by moving resources, voice, and choice directly into the hands of farmers.



Property Sold

In October, we sold RAFI's home for 25 years on Pittsboro Elementary School Road to the Town of Pittsboro. Post-COVID, we moved to a hybrid workplace model with many staff being totally remote. While it was a beloved space, we knew it could be better and more fully utilized by others. We are now housed in a co-working space in Pittsboro.



Michael Sligh

RAFI mourned the passing of Michael Sligh on November 7. Before his retirement in 2019, Michael was RAFI's Just Foods Program Director for 29 years. He was a visionary and leader in the sustainable and organic movement, playing an instrumental role in significant wins, including developing recommendations that established the National Organic Program. Michael was gifted at building collaborative efforts to create change.



What We Do

Working across agricultural sectors and through coalitions and collaborations, RAFI combines on-the-ground practical services and policy advocacy to ensure farmers can access the tools, resources, and information they need to make the right choices for their farms, communities, and the environment.

Advocating with Farmers

Through our Farm Advocacy team, we help farmers through farm financial crises. We also engage farmers in regulatory and legislative federal policy development and advocating with decision makers.

Building Partnerships to Shift Our Food System

Interwoven throughout all of our programming we are building partnerships with farmers, values-aligned groups, and churches to create alternative regional and local food systems and embed narrative change work.

Resourcing Farmers

RAFI offers various resources to farmers throughout the Southeast U.S., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, including farmer grants, targeted and specialized support on conservation and climate-smart practices, farm production planning, actionable trainings, and gathering spaces for peer-to-peer sharing.



Advocating with Farmers

“What we do is sit down with farmers and discuss the available strategies for how they want to move forward, but it’s always the farmer’s and their family’s decision on what is best for them. Once they’re able to make a decision from an informed position, we support them in that path forward.” — Benny Bunting, RAFI Lead Farm Advocate



Our 2025 Farm Advocacy caseload dropped as farmers dealt with immediate situations caused by the federal funding freeze, USDA programs being cancelled, and a government shutdown. We expect cases to rise in 2026 as the impacts of these disruptions hit farmers.

- RAFI Farmer Hotline Calls - **67**
- Intensive Cases Served - **34**
- 8 Cases Resolved - **8 of 8 farmers still farming**
- Economic Impact of Cases **\$789,100**
- **26** Active Cases at Year-end

“In 2021, we were hit with the devastating news that our corporate poultry integrator was terminating our contract. We were left with a tremendous amount of debt. Over the next year, we managed to pay some of the debt down by selling some of our equipment, but we could not secure another contract. In early 2023, we contacted Farm Aid, who put us in touch with RAFI. Mr. Benny Bunting helped us get relief as distressed borrowers who had direct and guaranteed FSA loans. Being threatened with foreclosure and losing everything we had worked for all of our lives, we began to see light at the end of the tunnel. We give special thanks to Benny Bunting and the whole RAFI team for being such hard workers and great advocates for us and all the other farmers they help. There are no words to express our thanks and heartfelt gratitude for all that you have done for us.”

— Mike & Pat Mercer, Georgia

Partnerships to Shift Our Food System



Wild Bergamot on a NC
Seed Stewards farm

Come to the Table

CTTT empowers faith communities to participate in the creation of a just food system through collaboration, capacity building, and advocacy. With the theme “Food &”, our CTTT team hosted 7 events and 2 multi-day retreats for a deep dive into how food access and food justice are connected to narrative, root causes, and relationships.

350 people participated

Grassroots Farm Policy Community

Our Grassroots Farm Policy Community enhances the capacities of smaller farmer-serving groups, from Hawaii to the Caribbean, to build their federal farm policy engagement muscle through connections, training, and financial support.

**\$531,000 in grants were awarded to
27 grantees in 18 States/Territories**

NC Seed Stewards

NC Seed Stewards are Farmers of Color Network members who grow NC-ecotype wildflower seed as a new income stream and to expand the ecological assets on farms for future generations. In 2025, farmers harvested seed of 3 varieties (Eastern Bearded Tongue, Wild Bergamot, & Mountain Mint) and planted 8 new varieties.

**NC Botanical Garden bought the seed to be used in
restoration projects across the state.**

Regranting

RAFI is proud to be an intermediary funder to farmers and farmer-serving groups. This is another way we challenge corporate dominance - by shifting resources and decision-making directly to farmers and underrepresented communities, rather than leaving those choices in the hands of corporations.

All Regranting \$1,056,580



Grants to Farmers



14 Beginning Farmer stipends
(farming 3 or less years) - up to \$5K



13 Caribbean Infrastructure grants
- up to \$5K



15 Mainland Infrastructure grants
- up to \$10K



18 Phase 2 Rebuilding grants
to farmers impacted by Hurricanes
Helene & Milton - up to \$10K



14 Climate-Smart Implementation grants
to farmers adversely impacted by USDA
cancellation of the Climate Smart
Commodities program - \$5K



7 Immediate Response grants



Top to bottom:

Jossie Rodriguez Ramirez, Hacienda Luna Roja produces papaya, beans, guava, cherry tomatoes, and plantains - Caribbean Farmers grant

Marisol Villalobos Rivera, Amasar LLC. is an eco-friendly and sustainable agribusiness - Caribbean Farmers grant

Lynn McLaurin, Triple T's Ranch 22.8-acre grass-fed beef operation - Beginning Farmer stipend

Top to bottom:

Wenceslaus Provost Jr., Provost Farm is an 85-acre family farm in Louisiana producing sugarcane - Infrastructure grant

Brooke Kornegay, Kornecopia Farm is a diversified vegetable and herb farm - Beginning Farmer stipend

Top to bottom:

Pablo Perez Cruz of Injertia Manases, produces fruit grafts - Caribbean Farmers grant

Ramrati Lohain, Natural and Local is a 1.5-acre farm growing Asian herbs & vegetables - Infrastructure grant

Angela Brigmon, Brigmon Farms is a 10 acre family farm producing heritage poultry and small livestock - Infrastructure grant

Some of our Community



Top to bottom:
Howard Allen of Faithfull Farms partners with RAFI in providing hands-on training for a variety of production practices such as high tunnel construction.

In 2025, our Farmers of Color Network Buyer-Connect event was hosted by our partner Fresh Point in Charlotte, NC.

Samuel Morales Cotto had a solar water pump installed on his operation Finca Don Cotto supported by RAFI PR staff.

Top to bottom:
Tom Savage Allied Organic Farms in Person County, NC is a founding member of our NC Seeds Stewards, producing native wildflower seed for pollinators and added income.

RAFI partners with Farm Aid and Farmers' Legal Action Group on the Distressed Borrowers Assistance Network (DBAN) to build the capacity of farm support organizations to provide high quality assistance to farmers in financial distress.

Our Come to the Table program partners with many faith communities across NC and through its "Food &" retreats, workshops and networking opportunities examining the root causes of food security, access, and justice.

Top to bottom:
In March, RAFI partnered with Professor Jairo Restrepo for an immersive training on agroecological practices for organic agriculture in Utuado, PR.

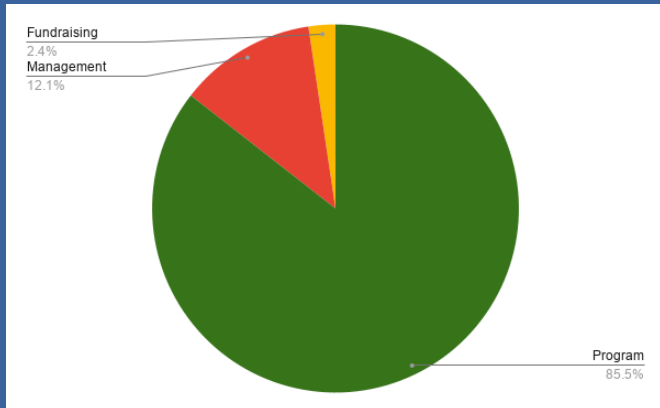
Weaver Street Markets, a NC natural co-op grocery partnered with us on Hurricane Helene relief.

The Muse brothers operate Muse 3 Farm in Greensburg, LA, raising livestock on 100 acres of rotationally grazed pasture. They partner with RAFI to provide conservation practices training and TA to other farmers.

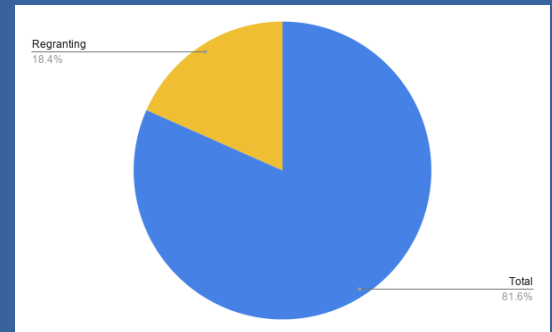


2025 Financials

Functional Expenses 2025



Regranting Percentage 2025



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. We are also grateful to the more than 32 foundations and federal agencies and more than 25 Donor Advised Funds that have provided grants to RAFI.

Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA (EIN 56-1704863) is committed to transparency, ethical accounting, and responsible stewardship of donations. We are pleased to have earned the 2026 Platinum GuideStar Exchange Seal, and the tenth consecutive 4-star rating from Charity Navigator.



Board of Directors



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Open Markets Institute

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Consultant

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Puerto Rico

Jarred White
Staff Representative

RAFI Executive Staff
Edna Rodriguez, Co-Director
Kavita Koppa, Co-Director



Photo Descriptions

Cover - Ian Pagan Roig's farm El Josco Bravo, Puerto Rico

Page 2 - Just Foods Director Kelli Dale planting NC native wildflower plugs

Page 3 - Farm Aid Concert 2025 in Minnesota, RAfi Homegrown Village exhibit -
The Great American Recipe Roll Call

Page 4 top - Edna Rodriguez in USVI in 2023 with farmer Benita Martin

Page 4 middle - RAfi's former property and offices at 274 Pittsboro Elementary
School Road, Pittsboro, NC

Page 4 bottom - Michael Sligh, former RAfi Just Foods Director

Page 5 - Gudelia Acevedo Caro, Caribbean Farmer 2025 Grantee

Page 6 - Mike and Pat Mercer, Farmers in Georgia

Page 7 - Wild Bergamot on Tom Savage's farm as part of the NC Seed Stewards

Page 8 - Chainie Brannigan, Caribbean Farmer 2025 Grantee

Page 12 - Pranee Loffer, The Secrest Garden, Infrastructure 2025 Grantee

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