



MOFGA Statement of Intent For Participation in the Confluence: First Light Learning Journey (Cohort 3)

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) is preparing enthusiastically to participate in the third cohort of Confluence: First Light Learning Journey (FLLJ), which is scheduled to begin in November 2024. This will be MOFGA's second time engaging in the FLLJ, Sarah Alexander (executive director) and Ellen Sabina (board member) having represented MOFGA in the first cohort. Various other MOFGA staff and board members participated in special sessions during that cohort. For the upcoming cohort MOFGA will be represented by staff members Heather Spalding (deputy director) and Ryan Dennett (programs director), and board member Seth Kroeck (treasurer).

MOFGA is working to be a strong ally to the Wabanaki Community and is committed to supporting indigenous prosperity. We come to the FLLJ with open hearts and minds and a willingness to learn about the past and current harms to the Wabanaki people. As a non-native-led organization, we also want to learn from and collaborate with other non-native organizations that are working to expand land access and stewardship in this region. MOFGA works closely on programming and advocacy with several of the organizations that will participate in the upcoming cohort. We hope that the experience, knowledge and resources that MOFGA has gathered from a broad-based community of organic farmers, gardeners and eaters, will be helpful to the ongoing discussions about expanding access and stewardship of Wabanaki foodways.

What is now Maine has supported a system of Wabanaki hunting, fishing, and gathering grounds through time immemorial. Before European colonization, these grounds were accessible by the Wabanaki for their seasonal hunting, fishing, and gathering of traditional and culturally important foods and medicines.

Currently, most of the land is held privately by individuals and companies, by land trusts and non-profit organizations, and by state and local governments. This ownership of the land, as well as the institution of regulations for hunting, fishing, and gathering, has resulted in limiting the access for the Wabanaki and has led to a loss of access to traditional foods.

All Wabanaki Nations are sovereign and have an inherent right to feed their people in ways that they determine support the health, wellbeing and traditions of their community.

MOFGA is committed to supporting Wabanaki Food Sovereignty:

- We have heard from Indigenous leaders that food sovereignty is of paramount importance. We share the commitment to this issue and honor it.
- We are active listeners and are ready to support when asked, and know that this support needs to follow Wabanaki leadership.



- We're prepared to co-create with Wabanaki communities when that is desired. We want to both listen and contribute, and lend our experience and resources to help address Wabanaki food sovereignty challenges in step with our Wabanaki colleagues.
- We are committed to transformational change toward food system justice that centers Wabanaki Food Sovereignty, but we do not wish to prescribe the path toward that change.
- We are not seeking to perpetuate current systems that don't work, though we can offer resources and opportunities from our current reality while simultaneously envisioning, designing, and implementing a better future together.
- We are organizing ourselves as a group of farming, fishing and food system community members with the goal of bringing our power and privilege to bear to build the prosperity of Wabanaki people without burdening our Indigenous colleagues with additional demands.
- We believe that food is a human right, and that we're facing a climate crisis and instability in our communities that demand a transformative and just response. We believe that all people must benefit from food system resiliency centered on Wabanaki leadership and food sovereignty, and based in millennia of Indigenous knowledge and sustainable land stewardship.
- We recognize that Wabanaki people have been displaced from ancestral lands, foods, and medicines, and oppressed by white settler colonialism, and we as a group are committed to participating in undoing that injustice.
- We believe that doing this work is necessary to be whole, and it comes from a place of great joy and a belief in possibility and reciprocity.

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association is committed to working towards Wabanaki prosperity, tribal sovereignty and food sovereignty. Our mission is to work for a fair and healthy food system for all of us, and we recognize that Wabanaki food sovereignty is a critical part of accomplishing this mission. We also recognize the interdependence of all aspects of a healthy food system, and the importance of Wabanaki knowledge, stewardship and leadership in creating a regenerative food system that supports all of us.

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association brings:

- Commitment from its board, executive director and staff
- Longstanding relationships with many food producers throughout Maine
- Technical assistance for organic food production including fruit, vegetables, livestock, tree crops and perennials
- Fact sheets, a quarterly newspaper, and much information
- Practical knowledge /Expertise in food production, marketing, business development
- Equipment
- Opportunities and connections with working capital and a network of food system organizations regionally and nationally

Examples of ongoing collaborations between MOFGA and Wabanaki community members:

- For more than 30 years, the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance has had a market and demonstration tent at MOFGA's annual Common Ground Country Fair. Vendors sell handcrafted traditional Maine Native American baskets and products by Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Passamaquoddy and Penobscot artisans. The area also promotes other Native artwork and culture, such as beadwork, woodcarvings, moose hide drums, birch bark, beaded and quill jewelry, Native American drumming and singing in Native Wabanaki languages, and traditional and newer styles of native dancing and dress. MIBA also promotes Native American businesses that use traditional formulas based on cultural values, adapted to modern day production, and that meet the goals and objectives of MOFGA by encouraging the revival of agriculturally based rural communities. The area seeks to promote a better understanding and appreciation of Maine Native people and culture through educational displays with historical references.
- Climate Smart Commodities grants for climate smart farming practices
- Collaborating with Niweskok to amplify their fundraising efforts for land access
- Collaborating with Penobscot Tribal Farm on workshops funded by United Southern and Eastern Tribes project
- In-person visits and networking over zoom to hear needs and connect with resources

Examples of ongoing collaborations among MOFGA, other [non-native organizations in the third FLLJ cohort](#), and Wabanaki community members:

- MOFGA executive director Sarah Alexander helps facilitate a monthly food sovereignty working group with past participants of First Light Learning Journey.
- MOFGA has joined a broad coalition of non-native organizations advocating for Wabanaki tribal sovereignty through Maine's legislative process. Despite repeated veto actions taken by Governor Janet Mills, we remain committed to helping advance the cause of tribal sovereignty, and increased access to and stewardship of land and natural resources in the land we call Maine. Other important and successful initiatives related to tribal sovereignty that MOFGA supported include:
 - LD 870 (in 2021), which established the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations To Study the Impact of Policies Regarding Agriculture, Access to Land, Access to Grants and Access to Financing on African American and Indigenous Farmers in the State
 - LD 906 (in 2022), which helped the Passamaquoddy people at Sipayak gain access to clean drinking water after a 40-year struggle with water contamination from the local water district
 - LD 2007 (in 2024), which expanded criminal jurisdiction of tribal courts.

Finally, MOFGA's official Land Gifts policy (i.e. how MOFGA manages charitable donations of real estate) includes consideration of the Wabanaki Community. Here is an excerpt:

Upon receipt of a gift of real estate, in support of MOFGA's work and strategic goals committed to equity and restorative land justice, and following Board ratification, MOFGA may consider:

- *Partnering with and transferring property to a mission-aligned land trust, tribe, or other entity committed to land justice and land access for Indigenous people and farmers who have faced generations of disinvestment.*
- *Partnering with a mission-aligned land trust to transfer property and sell existing infrastructure assets to support MOFGA's ongoing programs.*
- *Selling all or a portion of the property to support MOFGA's ongoing programs and, when designated by the Board, share a portion of the proceeds with a mission-aligned land trust, tribe, or other entity committed to land justice work.*