



NH FOOD ALLIANCE

Network Health Assessment 2021



**Collaborating to build a food
system that works for all**

Since 2013

About the NH Food Alliance

The NH Food Alliance connects and amplifies the incredible work of our partners throughout New Hampshire and New England by catalyzing collaboration and collective action in six areas. We work together to

- Increase Farmland Conservation and Access
- Support Local Farm, Fish, and Food Businesses
- Grow the Movement of Local Eaters
- Improve Food Security and Local Food Access
- Respond and Adapt to Climate Change
- Promote Racial Equity in Our Food System

Mission

NH Food Alliance is a statewide network that connects the people, business, organizations, and communities dedicated to growing a thriving, fair, and sustainable local food system in the Granite State. Together we build relationships, learn from each other, and catalyze collaboration to advance our common goals, respond creatively to challenges, and amplify our collective impact.

Vision

We envision a diverse and well-connected network of trusted partners working together to grow and sustain local farms, fisheries, and food businesses, secure healthy food access for all, build climate resilience, and ensure racial equity in our communities and workplaces.

Impact

In the next 5 years, the NH Food Alliance will leverage the collaborative infrastructure that we've built to advance our mission and vision by:

- Diversifying and deepening network connections and engagement, especially among traditionally underrepresented communities, policy-makers, and climate groups.
- Activating and engaging network partners and the public through inspirational storytelling and shared communication tools and resources.
- Catalyzing collaboration to advance policy changes, generate knowledge, and build collective solutions at the community, state, and regional levels.
- Fostering learning and skill-building among network partners to advance effective leaders, collaborators, and advocates for change.



About the Network Health Assessment

Evaluating the network regularly by conducting bi-annual Network Health Assessments allows us to measure progress and helps provide overall strategic direction for the Alliance. The assessments are conducted using an online survey that is shared with anyone who has participated—at any level—with the NH Food Alliance. Results were analyzed question by question, as well as across survey years (2016, 2019, and 2021).

2021 Network Health Assessment Objectives

1

To better understand how people participate in the Alliance and how it impacts their work, including: How the network has changed over time, how COVID impacted the network and how the network impacted the COVID response of participants.

2

To assess if the network improved to better serve participating individuals and organizations, and the New Hampshire food system.

2021 Results

A Global Pandemic

COVID-19 led to considerable disruption in the local food system, revealing cracks in many global and national supply chains. While consumer interest in local food surged and many New Hampshire farmers benefitted, the need for food assistance also significantly increased. The network shifted direction to address immediate food access and technical support needs, then shifted again to find funding to support “shovel-ready” projects.

As the statewide food system network in New Hampshire, the NH Food Alliance has a unique understanding of the needs and opportunities that exist to support food security and farm viability throughout the state. The global pandemic made it clear just how important the network is in responding to those needs by connecting people to resources. Unable to meet in-person, the network offered a diversity of events virtually, maintaining collaborations and information exchange.

The results of the 2021 Network Health Assessment reflect both the impact on the network as well as the network’s response to COVID-19. The data show that engagement remained the same or increased modestly since the 2019 Assessment, which is meaningful given the context of a global pandemic that prevented most in-person gatherings.

“[There is] lots more money and interest in local food system [as a result of the pandemic]! [It is] easier to connect with broader network because of virtual meetings/events.”

-2021 Survey Respondent

“[The pandemic has] expedited the exchange of information and the formation of partnerships, and thus, it's facilitated specific actions such as the development of the NH Feeds NH Program.”

-2021 Survey Respondent

2021 Results

Participation

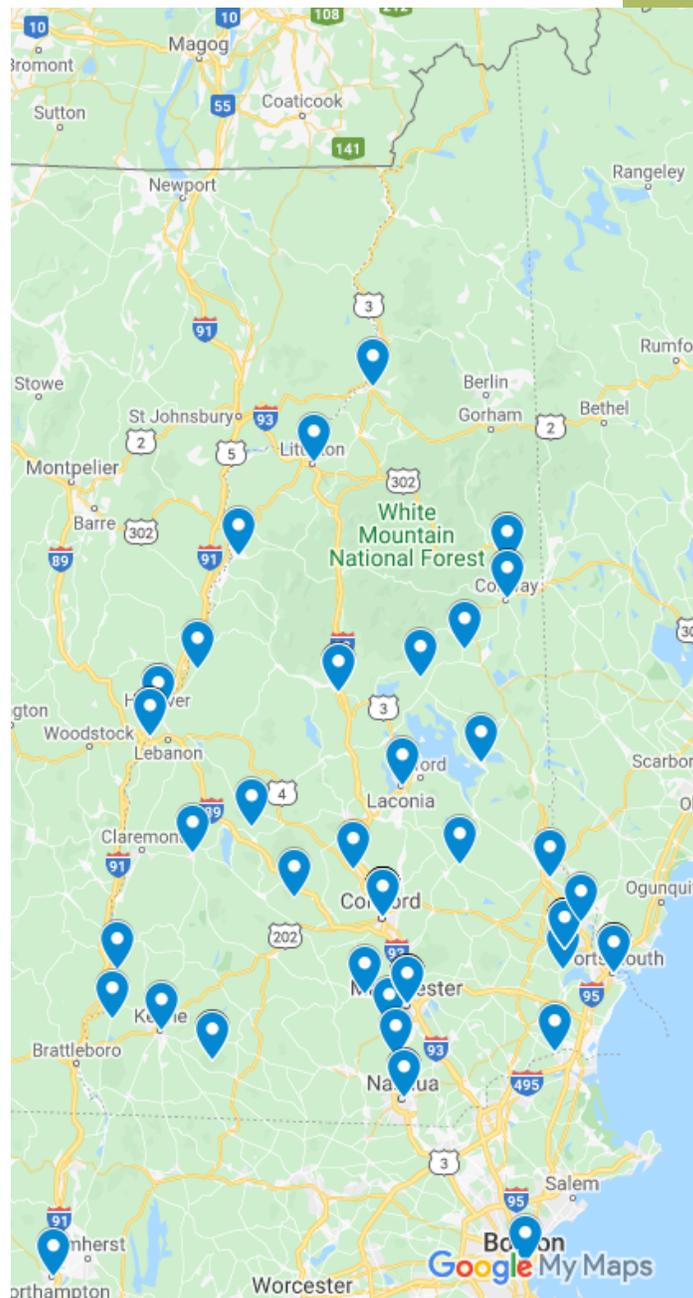
We received 90 valid responses in 2021, 91 in 2019, and 62 in 2016. We counted “valid” responses as ones that progressed past at least two questions, with at least one non-blank response.*

The majority of survey respondents (40% in 2021 and 50% in 2019) participate in the network through their organization, while less than 20% participate solely on an individual level. Over 30% of respondents participate both as individuals as well as through their organization.

The majority of respondents work statewide (30%), while 10-25% of respondents work in one or more of the six regions of the state (North Country, Dartmouth/Lake Sunapee, Lakes, Seacoast, Merrimack Valley, and Monadnock).

Representation of respondents' focus within the food system has changed over time, and reflects the network response to real-time needs. For example, in 2021 we saw a substantial increase in representation for food access work, which speaks to the significant increases in the number of food insecure individuals due to the pandemic.

**We reported 94 valid responses in 2019 due to a slight difference in counting, when we did not check for blanks.*

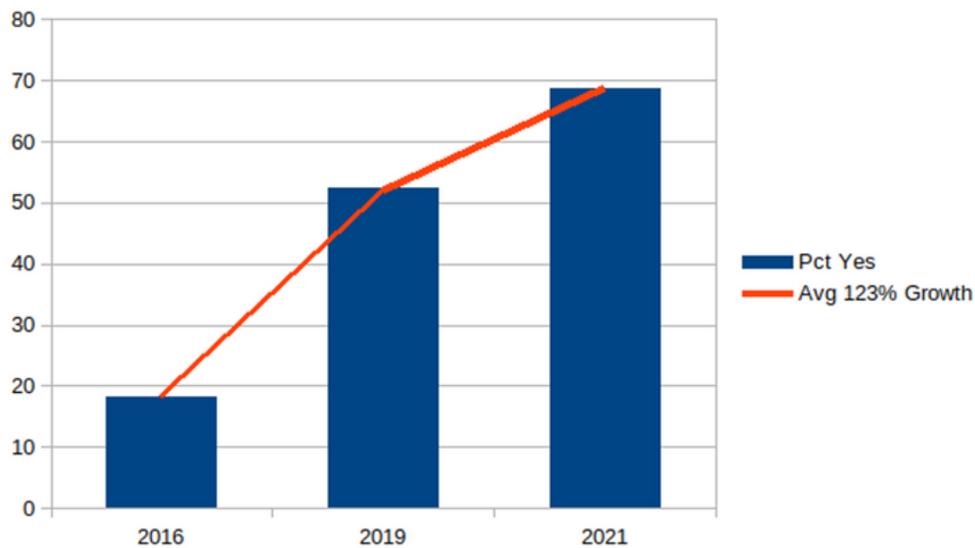


This map shows the organizations represented by 2021 survey respondents.

2021 Results

Network Engagement

We continue to see a positive impact on network partners as a result of participating in the network. When asked, "Has your work, or the way you work, changed as a result of participating in the NH Food Alliance?" 'yes' responses increased from 18.2% in 2016 to 52.4% in 2019 to 68.8% in 2021, showing an average 123% increase over time.

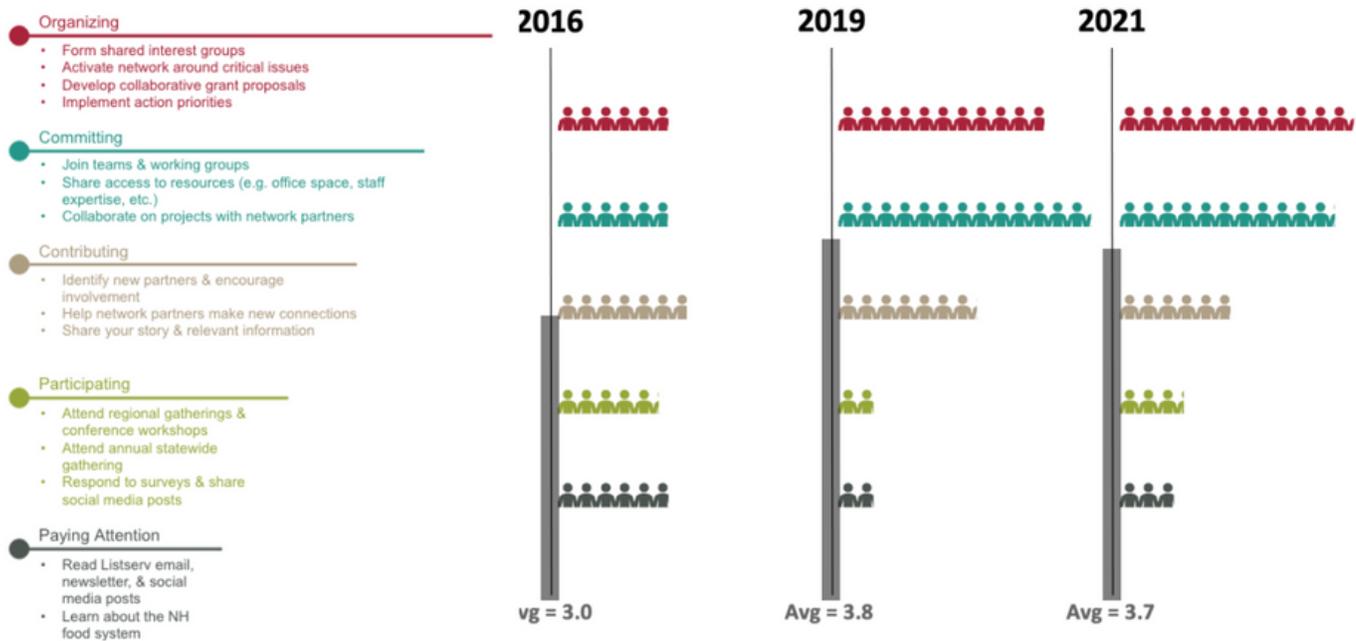


"[The NH Food Alliance] is my primary resource [for] issues of food and farms in New Hampshire. Without it, I don't have a broad "second option" to turn to."

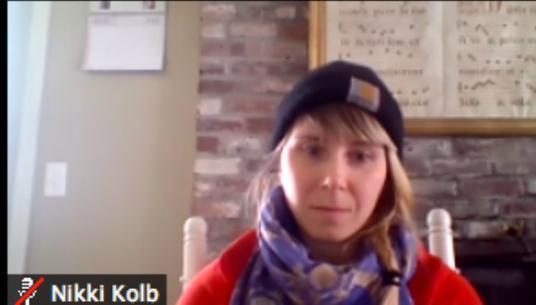
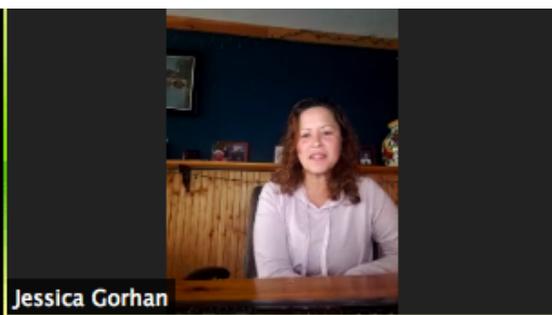
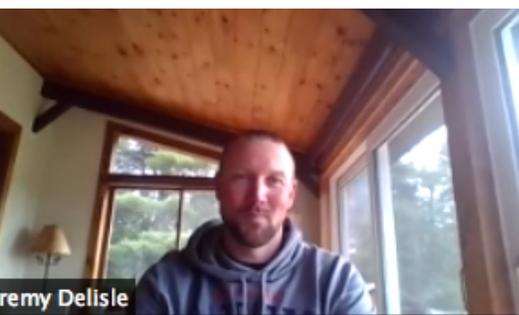
-2021 Survey Respondent



We also saw a shift in how partners are participating in the network. Survey responses show steadily increasing rates at the highest level of engagement, Organizing, with no significant change in average scores over the last two years. Engagement scores are based on the same rubric used in 2019, as shown in the figure below.



“[The NH Food Alliance] has helped me build relationships and establish trust. It has helped me build my career and achieve organizational and personal goals and outcomes.” - 2021 Survey Respondent



2021 Results

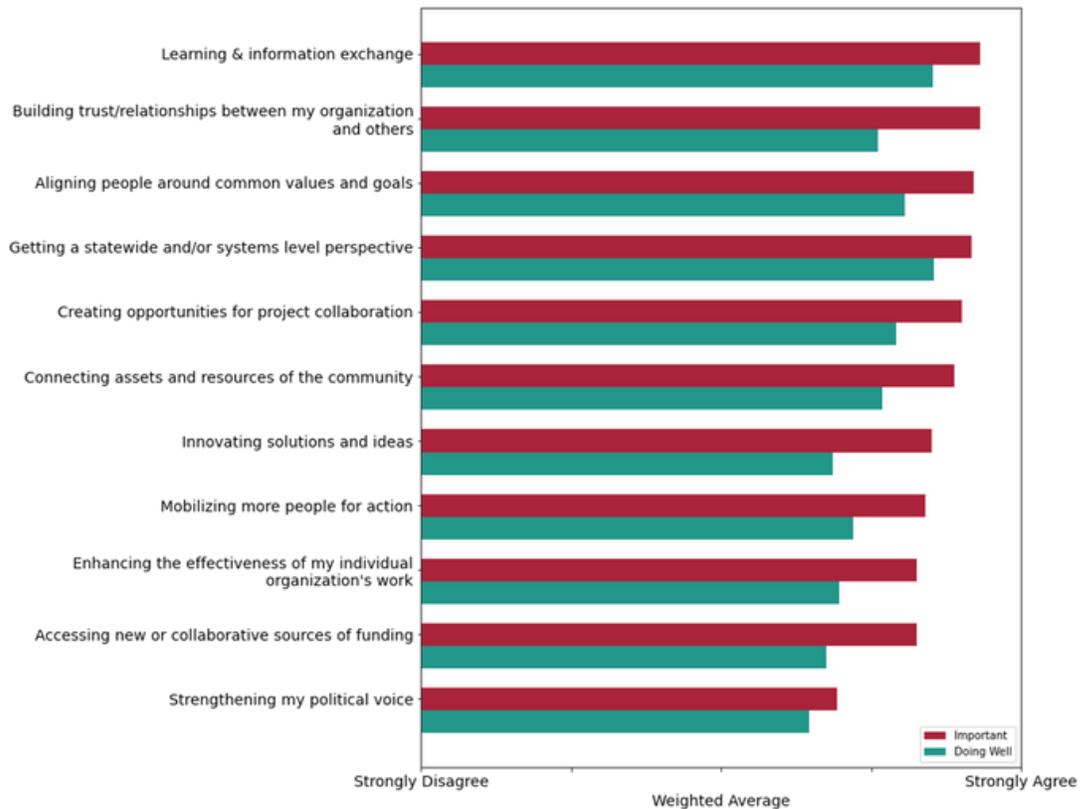
Network Benefits & Opportunities

When asked which network benefits were important to them or their organization, respondents indicated that “building trust/relationships between [their] organizations and others” was the most important network benefit. Followed closely by “learning and information exchange,” “aligning people around common values and goals,” and “creating opportunities for project collaboration.”

While these results suggest that the network has the right focus—connecting and convening—and is effective at influencing the way partners work, the gap analyses below show opportunities for improvement in each area.

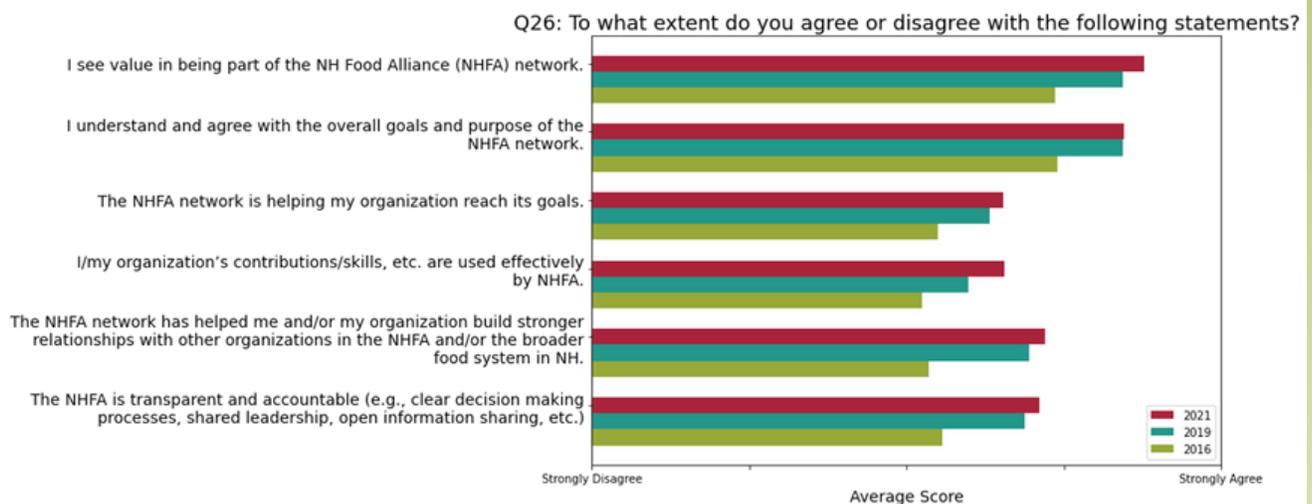
We asked the following question: Networks can offer their participants many benefits, such as those listed below. For each benefit listed, please indicate your agreement with the statements

- This benefit is important to me or my organization.
- The NH Food Alliance is doing a good job promoting this benefit.



We see narrow gaps for “learning and information exchange” and “getting a statewide and/or systems level perspective,” and wider gaps for “building trust/relationships” and “innovating solutions and ideas.” We interpret these data as confirmation that the network helps members to see statewide issues, and has room to grow at helping partners collaborate on those issues. This gap analysis will be important to revisit in the 2023 Network Health Assessment and could be an important indicator of overall network health and effectiveness.

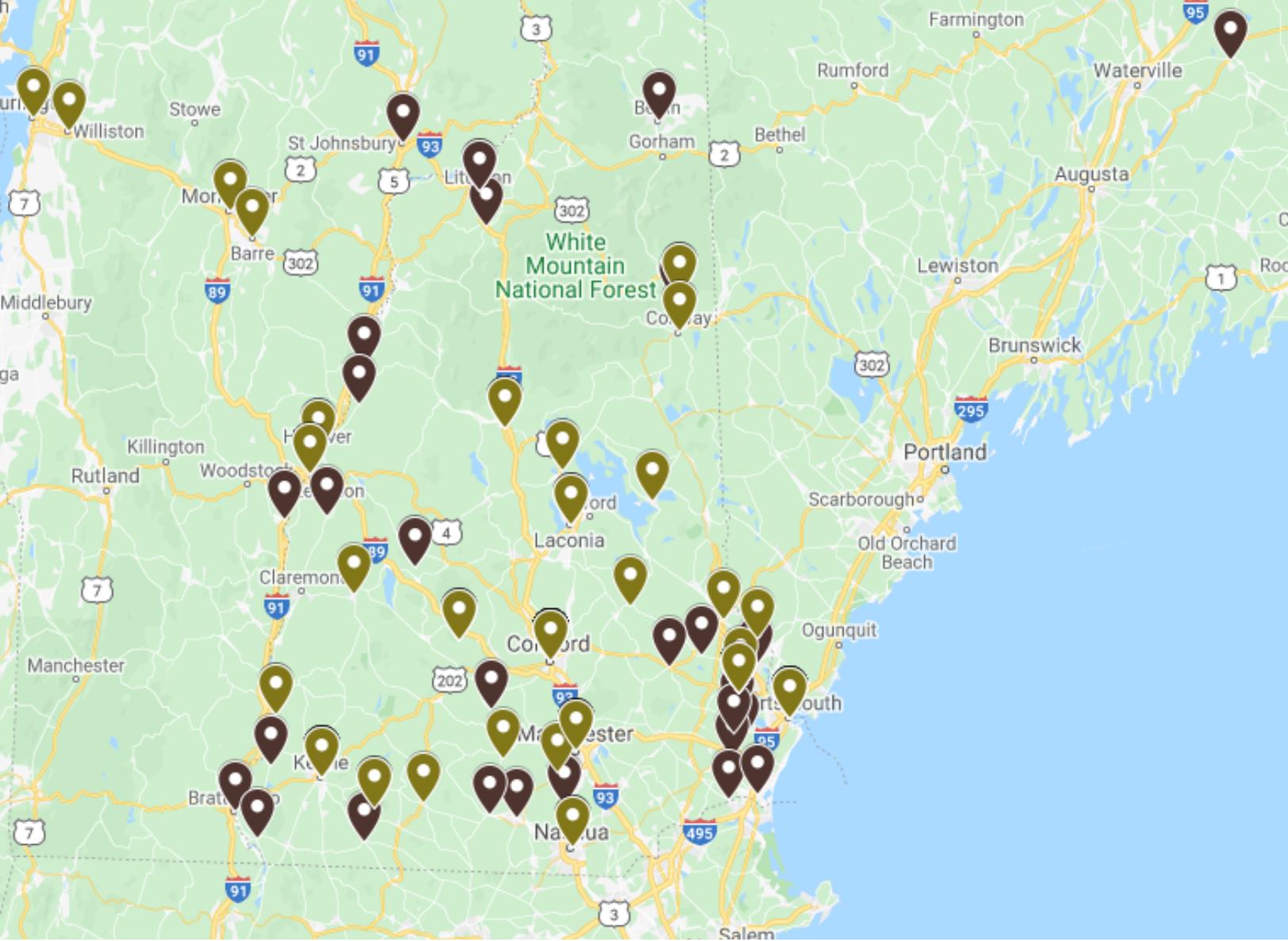
While there are gaps for each benefit area, responses to other questions about the functioning of the network suggest that we are succeeding in working towards our collective goals. The figure below speaks to the overall health of the network, where we see improvement in each priority area.



Coordinating around a shared set of values is a key component of collective impact. From the 2015 Farm, Fish, and Food Enterprise Viability Initiative to the 2021 impact revenue strategy, our common goals and agenda guide our collaborative work. The 2021 survey shows a steady increase in alignment around priorities.

“Placing focus on racial equity in the workplace and connecting me with partners in my focus area to further my research goals.”

- 2021 Survey Respondent



2021 Results Network Map

The network map on the above was developed to show where existing partners (brown) and potential new partners (Green) are located in the state. Data was derived from the open-ended question: “Of all the people, organizations, networks, and/or initiatives that you work with, which 3-5 specific relationships are most important to your work on food in New Hampshire?”

We compiled data on these important partnerships and compared that with 2019. We discovered a very dynamic network, and we encourage members to explore opportunities to build new relationships. An interactive version of this map can be found on our website to facilitate those opportunities.



Conclusion

Our goals with the third bi-annual Network Health Assessment were to better understand how people participate in the Alliance and how it impacts their work, and to assess if the network improved to better serve participating individuals and organizations, and the New Hampshire food system. Overall, we see positive trends in our network development, including increases in partner commitment, better alignment around core values, and finding value in our collective work.

The majority of Food Alliance partners have a statewide focus in their work, and the sectors represented have shifted over the last six years, likely in response to shifting needs in the food system. Survey respondents listed 67 organizations not identified in 2019, as important to their work, which presents an opportunity to expand the Food Alliance through existing partners.

Additionally, while it seems that the network is focused on benefits that are important to network partners, there is a gap in how well those benefits are provided. This is an opportunity for growth and should be re-evaluated in the 2023 Assessment.

We see a steady increase in alignment around the value of participating in the network from 2016-2021, and an average 123% increase since 2016 in the number of respondents who have changed the way they work as a result of participating in the network.

Thank you!

This report was developed by the NH Food Alliance staff, with help from Bruce Hoppe of Connective Associates. The authors would like to thank all of the NH Food Alliance partners who took the time to complete the survey and offer their valuable feedback, as well as all those partners who have stepped up to serve on the Network Leadership Team, to develop grant proposals, and run a diversity of programs around the state. The NH Food Alliance continues to grow and strengthen due to the work of all of our committed network partners. If you would like more information about this assessment, including the survey questions and quantitative results for each, please contact us directly.

Land Acknowledgement

The NH Food Alliance is based at the University of New Hampshire, Durham, on land that is N'dakinna, which is the traditional ancestral homeland of the Abenaki, Pennacook, and Wabanaki Peoples past and present. As we all journey on the trail of life, we wish to acknowledge the spiritual and physical connection the Pennacook, Abenaki, and Wabanaki Peoples have maintained to N'dakinna (homeland) and the aki (land), nibi (water), lolakwikak (flora), and awaasak (fauna), which the University of New Hampshire community is honored to steward today. We also acknowledge the hardships they continue to endure after the loss of unceded homelands and champion the university's responsibility to foster relationships and opportunities that strengthen the well-being of the Indigenous People who carry forward the traditions of their ancestors. For more information about our shared indigenous heritage, please visit Indigenous NH.

The New Hampshire Food Alliance is a statewide food system network coordinated by:



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