

Meet Our New Team Member

Selena Cozart

Food Justice Network Coordinator



Where are you from?

I was born and raised in Philadelphia, PA. My parents were from the South and moved to Philly during the Great Migration. My father grew up in Tallahassee, FL where his mother was an herbalist and a midwife and his father was a veteran of WWI. My mother grew up just north of Durham, NC, the daughter of a tobacco farmer who worked all of his life to be able to own the land he worked on, and her mother was a school teacher who had to leave her profession when she got married and began having children.

Who's your favorite person and why?

I have so many. If I had to choose, it would be my grandfather, Ollie Lee Taylor. He died when I was two years old, so what I know of him is from family stories and impressions they had of him. He was one of 12 children and he had to work the land in order to put his younger siblings through school. He went on to marry and have seven children of his own, each of whom either went to post-secondary school or developed a trade. The more I learn and understand about the forces that shaped his opportunities, the deeper my pride about and appreciation of his accomplishments become.

What's your favorite saying/quote/adage?

You are talking to someone who has collected quotes since high school. The one that comes to mind for me now is “I am the medicine that I seek”. It comes from a song that I learned recently. The essence of the song is that what you may be looking for outside of yourself actually resides inside of you. When you take the time to cultivate the “medicine,” you are in the process of healing the things which called for the medicine in the first place.

What is one thing you are or you have done that makes you proud of yourself?

I planted a garden this year for the first time. I am proud of myself because I didn't do it alone and I work with it every day. I had both physical and educational support from many friends so those connections were enhanced as a result. I reconnected to my family history because I come from the land on both sides of my family. I really sense my father's presence when I'm out there. And the bonus is that now I get to share what the land produced with my neighbors and friends.

If you were any fruit or vegetable, what would you be?

I would be a ground cherry. Those little pouches of goodness are a complex surprise. Inside of those papery husks reside little self contained drops of flavor that I describe as a pop of pineapple chased by the essence of a tomato with a little kick at the end. I just love that there is more to those little gifts of nature than the appearance would suggest.

What's your favorite meal?

There are so many to choose from. Meal of the day? Meal for a holiday? Meal of the week? Combination of dishes? But since you have limited space to hear about all of that, I will tell you that my favorite meal is my family's traditional New Year's Day meal which consists of Black-eyed peas, cornbread, macaroni and cheese, collard greens, ribs, smoked turkey wings, rice, and sweet potato pie. Growing up, we would go to my aunt's house to ring in the new year and have her version of those dishes and later in the day when we got home, we would have the "Real Thing" that my mother had prepared. It was cool because we got to eat twice and still have leftovers.

What does food equity mean to you?

For me, the notion of food equity implies that we live in a society that cares for each member of our community in such a way that we are not content to live with our own needs met while leaving others to not have those same basic needs met. Food equity means that each of us have as a base line that we have foods that we enjoy and are healthy without worry. So, in a very basic and tangible way, food equity is a measure of the peace that we can experience as a society.

What most excites you about the work you are doing for Cultivate Charlottesville?

I am excited about all of the one on one conversations I get to have with representatives from the partner organizations that make up the Planning Team of the Food Justice Network. These conversations are opening my eyes to how much work is happening in the Food Justice space and I am excited to bring my experience with diversity, equity, and antiracism work to bear on the thoughtful and relevant work already happening within the food justice space.

What exciting plans (even though COVID-19 is making plans very difficult) do you have in the future?

I am preparing for recertification as a Doula with Birth Sisters of Charlottesville. I am going to spread that prep over several months. I have been a Doula for 4 years and will attend my first home birth in October (keep a good thought for mama, baby, and family). Additionally, I plan to take the Foundations course in Community Herbalism with Sacred Plant Traditions in Charlottesville starting in March

Anything else you want to share?

Even with all that is going on in the world right now, I am cultivating so much gratitude in my life. The thing I love about gratitude is that anyone can have it for anything and that it is not relative. If you are grateful, you are grateful and no one can take that from you. For me, it is a gateway to joy.