

# meet jeanette abi-nader



## → bio

Jeanette Abi-Nader (she | her) started as the Executive Director of City Schoolyard Garden in 2013 with the vision of transforming our work for social justice impact. Before Cultivate, she worked for a dozen years with the national food justice nonprofit, the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC). CFSC co-founded the National Farm to School Network and was instrumental in the passing of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act. As CFSC's Evaluation and Training and Capacity Building Director, Jeanette authored publications on strategic evaluation design including Whole Measures for Community Food Systems, Community Food Project Indicators of Success, and Growing Communities Curriculum.

Jeanette is the former Board Treasurer for the American Community Gardening Association, Vice President of the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group Board, and a founding member of the Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative (GFJI). GFJI is a national network focused on dismantling racism in the food system.

Jeanette is an experienced farmer, having launched the first community supported agriculture project in the state of Louisiana and as Director of Farms for Frontier Natural Products Co-op. She has a Masters of Science in Sustainable Systems/Agroecology and is a certified permaculture designer and instructor.

## → in her own words

### **What is the best part of having co-executive directors at Cultivate Charlottesville?**

Transitioning to an organizational model that includes co-executive directors is one element of our efforts to integrate racial equity practices throughout Cultivate. It is so wonderful to be part of a leadership team where we can bring our individual strengths together to refine our decision-making, clarify strategies, create a supportive organizational culture, take more time to build community relationships, and on and on. Plus, Richard is an amazing, compassionate, creative leader. He's fun to be around and brings such depth to our work.

### **What is the most important quality in a leader?**

At Cultivate we have this concept of “stepping into leadership”. The idea is that we each step into leadership in different ways according to the work we do, the way we see the context of our work, and how we show up as individuals. We all aim to be transformational leaders – which means we are working to transform unequal systems to build equity and wellness. This allows us to recognize many important qualities in a leader and the unique and beautiful ways that we each express our leadership.

### **What do you see as the most pressing goal in the food justice movement?**

For the Charlottesville food justice movement, I think it is critical that we begin to be realistic about our identity. Our food system does not serve everyone equally. Sure we are a foodie type town with a lot of restaurants, local farms, farmers’ markets, etc. But, not everyone in our community gets to experience this. We have some of the highest rates of food insecurity in the commonwealth and the lowest rates of potential for economic mobility in the country! Once we begin to accept these reality, we can prioritize being a “food equity” city and begin to put in place policies and practices that reflect this.

### **How did you become a farmer/gardener? what is your favorite thing to grow?**

My giddee had a garden where he grew a lot of the crops from old country so that he could make Lebanese dishes for our family. So, gardening was connected with this idea of family, food, culture, etc. But, I started farming as a tool for building justice and self-determination. I have farmed mixed veggies as part of a CSA model, medicinal and culinary herbs as part of a cooperative research farm, and community gardening as a tool for engaging and building community. I think in each of these models, I really connect with growing cover crops. Cover crops are the way we give the soil rest. We feed back into it and build nutrients for the next year’s crops. I just think they are beautiful and functional and I can learn a lot from cover crops.

### **Personally or professionally, what makes you most proud?**

I am so proud to be connected to the Cultivate team. And, I mean this broadly in terms of not only our staff and Board, but the youth food justice interns, the community advocates, our city partners, Food Justice Network partners. Just some pretty darn amazing people that are pulling together.

