



## Handpicked Podcast Season 5, Episode 1 Transcript

### Speaker Legend:

LY: Laine Young

CS: Charlie Spring

AS: Avni Soma

LK: Lauren Kepkiewicz

SH: Sima Habib

JC: Jun Cacayuran

MWM: Melissa West Morrison

TM: Tatenda Mambo

Speaker	Narration
LY	Hi everyone and welcome to another episode of Handpicked, Stories from the Field. I'm Laine Young...
CS	..And I'm Charlie Spring.
LY	<p>Today we share a conversation Charlie had with Dr. Lauren Kepkiewicz, who at the time of recording was a Banting Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Manitoba and who is now Assistant Professor of Transdisciplinary Mountain Studies at the University of Calgary, and Avni Soma, community-based researcher, member of the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council, Board Member of Alberta Food Matters, and a member of the Coalition of Healthy School Food.</p> <p>I was really excited when Charlie suggested an episode based around an event she was a panel member on called, "Cultivating Community: Food Justice in the Bow Valley and Beyond".</p> <p>So, while the original intention had been to focus on the event and the panelists, due to some problems with microphones as well as a temporarily missing memory card for our audio recorder, we weren't able to include</p>

	<p>as much of the panel event as planned. Instead, we focus on a panel conversation we had with Avni and Lauren, the event organizers, and complimented their thoughts with a few snippets from the panelists at the event.</p> <p>Charlie, can you tell us a bit about what the listeners will hear today?</p>
CS	<p>So, the event itself was in March 2024, organized and hosted by both Lauren and Avni. The basic idea of the event was to bring into conversation a diversity of people working on different aspects of food system change. After a lunch conversation between practitioners, advocates and researchers, I was lucky enough to be part of public discussion panel which included Syma Habib, a community practitioner working on municipal food resilience at the City of Calgary; Jun Cacayuran the President of the Filipino Organization in the Rocky Mountains (FORM); Melissa West Morrison, a facilitator, researcher, community artist and a plant alchemista; Dr. Tatenda Mambo, a Post-Doctoral scholar from the University of Calgary and who manages of the Simon Farm in Southern Alberta.</p> <p>I sat down with Avni and Lauren after the event to reflect on what we'd heard.</p>
LY	Okay, well let's hear your conversation..
CS	<p>So, the genesis for today's episode came from a gathering and a discussion panel that you two hosted back in a very snowy March in Canmore. And it was a panel that I was lucky enough to be a part of through knowing you both as friends. And also the fact that we all live in Alberta and have a shared passion for food justice.</p> <p>So, we're going to hear from some of the recordings from that event today, but I wanted to start with learning a bit more about how we all got here. So perhaps you could both briefly introduce yourselves and tell us how you know each other. Perhaps Avni, you first.</p>
AS	<p>Yeah. So, my name's Avni. I grew up in Calgary, so I grew up in Alberta. And, over a decade ago, I decided to move to the Bow Valley and got involved with, grassroots movements like the community garden. And that's where I met Lauren's partner, Adam. Again, it was well over a decade ago. And then over the years... So, he sat on the community gardening board with me, with a group of us. And then Lauren, actually, was my server on my first blind date with my current partner, so I think that is quite... I like that story. So that's how we met. And then. I was involved in food as, social entrepreneur. And so, Lauren would buy food from me, and that's how we got to know each other.</p>
LK	Lots of really good organic fruit.

AS	<p>Yeah, that was our specialty for sure. That was our specialty. And then, and then over the years, I was lucky enough to be part of an organization that kind of started looking at food from different aspects, which I wasn't fully, I would say aware of. My focus had always been on the, I guess, the business side of food. So, entrepreneurship and affecting change within the food system from that perspective. And I wasn't as aware of things like food insecurity and, and food justice, and so I would say I learned a lot of those things by being part of the Bow Valley Food Alliance, with Lauren. So, where I got to know more and learn more about that part of the food system through her.</p>
CS	<p>Lauren, is there anything that's add about how you guys know each other?</p>
LK	<p>Yeah, I mean, I think. I love going back to that story of serving Dan, Avni's partner, when I was waitressing at a local restaurant, and. Totally knowing that he was on a first date with somebody. It was just very clear and that his date was late. And then of me showed up and I obviously knew of me already. And so, it was fun to be part of that, that first that first meeting.</p> <p>And I think, as Avni said, you know, we've known each other through, variety of different circumstances and in some different spaces. And most recently, it's been a lot of different kinds of work and ups and downs with the Bow Valley Food Alliance, learning lots of different things, and then also doing some research together, and as well as co-organising this, this, this event in the Bow Valley.</p>
CS	<p>So yeah, you've mentioned the Bow Valley Food Alliance, so how about telling us a bit more about where you live and work, the Bow Valley? And perhaps, some of what its food system looks like and even what you understand by the very idea of a food system.</p> <p>And let's start with Lauren.</p>
LK	<p>Yeah. So, when I, I've been in the Bow Valley for about, well, over a decade as well, on and off though. And for me, the Bow Valley is I mean, it's a really magical place. It's in the mountains. But also, it has a lot of food systems challenges that are both unique as well as representative of food systems issues and challenges in other places.</p> <p>And for me, when I think of food systems challenges here, as well as most places, I think about how food systems on these lands have changed. So, if we go back a century or two ago, food systems looked really different here. And where I'm speaking from today, food systems were really centred around Buffalo. But by</p>

colonisation, including land appropriation, confinement onto reserves, residential schools and other methods of colonial violence by settler peoples and settler governments has created a lot of challenges for Indigenous nations to continue their responsibilities for food systems and for land. And yet, at the same time, Indigenous nations have also continued to cultivate and manage food systems on these lands in many different ways.

And where I'm speaking to you from today, Indigenous nations, including the, you know, Iyarhe Nakoda, Nitsutapi, the Tsuit'ina, the Ktunaxa as well as the Metis Nation District 4 continue to use these lands to hunt, to fish, to trade and to gather plants and medicines. But often in the Bow valley, Indigenous food systems are not celebrated or even acknowledged as local food systems. Although I think we're getting better at having those conversations, I think there's still a real, a real gap here in our understanding. And, you know, myself as a white settler and how, people from different backgrounds and positionalities are different, differently complicit in, in colonisation of food systems on these lands.

So, when I started this work in the Bow Valley. I was told repeatedly by people who had been doing this work for longer than me. That hunger is really a key challenge here in the Valley, but that hunger and food insecurity often remain, unacknowledged by people in positions of power, in particular. And when we talked about hunger in the Bow Valley. When I started doing this work, often we'd get responses from decision makers telling us, you know, that hunger isn't an issue here, or that the food bank is all the response that we need. And people would say things and I've heard decision makers say things like this that, you know, "if people can't afford to live here, then they should just go somewhere else."

So, I think one of the things that we were really hoping to do with this event was to problem problematize some of those assumptions, and we wanted to have conversations that unpack the ways that broader systems of oppression like white supremacy, colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy influence and shape our food systems here in the Bow Valley and also beyond. Because food systems are really interconnected, across geographies, and across communities. And yet at the same time, we also wanted to celebrate all the amazing work that people are doing in thinking about how we move towards more socially and ecologically just food systems and food futures.

CS	Great. Thanks. And Avni, is there anything you'd like to add about the Bow Valley where you live, what its food system looks like from where you are? And perhaps, you know, for your ideas about where this event came from and how you wanted to go about organising it.
AS	<p>For me, this event really represents like the shift that's happened for me in, not only how I view food and food systems, but our human systems that we exist in, in general.</p> <p>So, when I was a social entrepreneur, I saw food, almost, I would say in a binary way, which is how, you know, from colonialism, we've been taught to live and think in binary systems. And I would say over time and learning through Lauren and reading a lot of different things. You start to see, live in the less binary. And then that includes food and food, food systems.</p> <p>And so, one of the things that I've learned and have been starting to see, especially in politics, is how food is used as a weapon still to this day. So, it was used to colonise the lands that we live on. And we still see it being used to colonise us. Even I call, I call it, I call us the peasants, call us the peasants. It's continuously used to colonise us.</p> <p>And for me a big one is wheat. And, because my ancestry is South Asian and learning and understanding the green revolution in India and how it happened, and how wheat was not a part of where my family's originally from in India, originally, I mean, for the last, we know, like 4 or 5 generations. But that was not the staple of the diet and how wheat was introduced and how it basically has been used as a weapon because in, you know, my, my feeling in the 80s when I would see, like growing up in Canada, I would see these Western countries dropping wheat in India and African nations, and that I'm like, why are they dropping all this wheat? And you know, and it would I didn't understand that.</p> <p>So, then these concepts that Lauren mentioned, the research that we're doing, like the concepts of, white supremacy and white saviourism and stuff like that are starting to be, I guess, labelled and acknowledged. And I think that's one of the steps of food justice.</p>
LK	<p>Yeah. And I think that was those were things that we really wanted to bring out in this, this event because it's easy to not name them. And I know that, well, I know I've been in spaces and Avni and I have kind of conversations about being in spaces where people really don't want to name these. They feel really, personally implicated or attacked or like it's too much to say that there's racism and white supremacy and colonialism. And I think we also wanted to approach it in a way that is more like, this is just this is just the systems that we</p>

	<p>live in. And so, let's talk about it and let's acknowledge that it's harmful and it's violent, but also that people are doing work to break out of these systems, to dismantle these systems, to work within these systems and, and in ways that are rebelling against them, etc., etc..</p> <p>And I think for, you know, we of you and I began co organising this event in the fall and winter of 2023-2024. And our aim in doing this was to bring together folks who are working on different parts of the food system from across Alberta and BC, and in doing so to create connections, to inspire different types of actions, to learn from one another and to have some conversations that are happening but not always visible or, put out in the public spotlight.</p> <p>And I also want to note that this event, as well as the funding for it, emerged, out of a writing workshop and SSHRC Partnership Engage Grant that I worked on with Marit Rosol, it was Elizabeth Vibert and Eric Holt-Gimenez, Charlie also worked on writing the initial funding application as well.</p> <p>And our goal with this work was to bring together folks who focussed on different parts of the food system and who have different understandings of food systems issues, as well as who use different strategies and tools to address these issues. And I think bringing together people, who are working in different ways is really important in the context of broader food movements, where there's often tensions and how people understand and address key food systems issues.</p> <p>So, some folks are really focussed on, creating more sustainable food systems, addressing unsustainable food systems practices, which is really important. But sometimes, this focus can come into conflict or tension with folks who are really focussed on, addressing food insecurity and hunger.</p> <p>And so, with this work, we really aim to tease out how we can collaborate and work in solidarity across difference without negating those differences. You know, how do we celebrate not just our common goals of creating more ecological and socially just food systems? But how do we also celebrate and support the different ways we try to do this? And yeah, how do we engage with tensions that arise between our different approaches to food systems in ways that are supportive?</p>
CS	<p>That's really great. And before we move on to discuss kind of some of the nitty gritty of the challenges. Was there anything you wanted to add about how you organised this event?</p>

	<p>Which felt like you'd really put a lot of effort to organising in a good way. It was obviously a public event. So, it was meant to, to do raise conversations beyond just academics and practitioners.</p> <p>But I wondered if there was anything you wanted to add about how you wanted it to feel for people. And perhaps you know how you went about choosing, who you'd invite?</p>
AS	<p>One thing I'll say, in the Bow Valley, it's not yet a very diverse community in terms of, culture and race, it's getting there. But we're not there yet. And particularly in positions of governance. But we wanted to present something diverse. So, and that was one, one kind of angle that we were going for, but not only diversity in race and culture, but also diversity, in which, as Lauren said, which part of the food system each panellist comes from.</p> <p>So, we all, we all have, I call it like an entry point in in the food system. I always think of food system as circular, and then we each have a different entry point in how we interact with the system. So I think it was it was diverse in both aspects.</p>
LK	<p>Totally. And I think often. A lot of the work that have been done around food in the Valley has historically, in communities like Banff and Canmore, and the MD of Bighorn has been focussed on access to food. And how do people access food rather than also thinking about how that's interconnected with how food is produced, where it's coming from? Working conditions, whether that's on farms, whether that's, around fishing rights, transportation, waste and trying to connect all these different parts of, of the food system. And to say that these are all these are all important and they connect to each other, they connect us all in different and important ways.</p> <p>I think one of the other things that we were trying to be intentional about with the event and organising the event, was doing it in a way that centred relationships with each other to try to do it in a way that, those of us who were involved, particularly Avni and I, like that we didn't burn out, in doing it, even though that's hard to do when you're organising a big event.</p> <p>And also, to have children involved like to make it a space where children can also be present because of Avni and I are both mothers, Charlie, you're your mother as well. And I think one of the things that I have learned as</p>

	<p>I go along in my journey as a parent is that there's so much to learn from children, and it's really important and amazing to have children in our spaces and to welcome children into our spaces.</p> <p>And Avni works her magic when it comes to food and food procurement and doing that in an intentional way. And that often is an always seen, but I think it's felt, in, in. Yeah.</p>
AS	<p>And that that's one of those things that's just I just do it. But I, I know it's Lauren helps me label those things that to me are just like. Just what I do, you know? So, it does make a difference when you label it? Yeah.</p>
CS	<p>It was lovely and everyone was able to be fed and everyone brought their containers. And so, you had lots of people who I don't think had ever really engaged much with conversations about food systems. So, for me, it was a really special event.</p>
LK	<p>Yeah, and I mean, another thing that we didn't mention previously about organising this event was that one of the key parts of the event was actually a lunch, a smaller lunch that we held before the public event where we brought, a variety of different folks who work at a community based level together, both from the Bow Valley and the Calgary area, to talk about their experiences.</p> <p>And I think one of the great things that I continually learn from working with Avni is the importance of like centring story and relationship. And I think the question that we asked was to begin that, that conversation was, what is your what is your food story? And we spent most of the conversation talking about that. We didn't get to a lot of other questions, but it was it was it was perfect.</p> <p>And I think that smaller lunch too was really, really set to help set the scene for some of the panellists who we heard from later, some of the folks who were at the lunch, or a bunch of folks who were at the lunch stayed and listened. And, you know, having those conversations at different scales and smaller and at different scales and in different spaces is really important too. So that was that was also an important part of the event, I think as well.</p>
CS	<p>And perhaps we will move on to talking about what, what some of the conversations were that happen there. So, you know, you've reminded me of how including a diversity of people on a panel often highlights how</p>



	<p>people's perceptions of food system challenges and solutions can really differ according to where they're located and the different work that they do. And there can be tensions and trade-offs when you're trying to address different food system priorities and values all at once.</p> <p>But before we hear from the panellists, is there anything you'd like to add about what you see as the biggest challenges facing the Bow Valley when it comes to food? Perhaps Avni you'd like to go first.</p>
AS	<p>Well, I know, for me, again this is coming more from my entrepreneur background is that not enough people have the capacity to be aware, or are aware, for whatever reason, not enough people are aware that there are problems with the food system.</p> <p>Most people are happy to go into the grocery store, pick up whatever they need, or they feel they need, and that's it. There's no questioning around it. So, I would say that's like a, for me, that's a continuous thing that whether it comes from choosing something that's grown on a large scale monocrop farm, or even something that's in a package versus not in a package.</p> <p>So, there's, I would say there is not enough people in the Bow Valley, and I think it represents general food systems as well, are aware. There's just so many things to care about in a day and food is just not one of them when you have access to it like that.</p>
LK	<p>And I think that also fits into something that's really come up for me in the Bow Valley in particular, is there's this there's this veneer of happiness. And I mean, it's great to be happy, obviously, but there's a lot of glitz and glam in places like Canmore and Banff- fancy restaurants, high end hotels, beautiful mountain vistas.</p> <p>But beneath sort of this, all these happy stories, which are important, and they are part of this place there's also some very different stories, stories, about hunger and food insecurity, of people working many jobs to make ends meet of workers not being treated well. There's a lot of precarity in terms of employment, particularly for temporary foreign workers. Housing is really difficult. We have astronomical housing prices here. We also have, housing that's often tied to employment, which feeds into precarious employment situations. I've heard stories, many stories about inadequate cooking facilities and staff housing, everything</p>

	<p>from ten people sharing a small kitchen to folks living in staff accommodation who only have access to a hot plate.</p> <p>So, I think there's this narrative around this place that doesn't sometimes leave a lot of room for unpacking some of the complexities and some of the not so some, some of the not so nice parts of what it means to live in a mountain town that's heavily reliant on tourism and, tourist industry.</p> <p>There's also a perception that we can't grow food here in the mountain, either because of the climate, or that we shouldn't grow food because it's a wildlife attractant. And this is a longer story and it's a valid concern. Obviously, we don't want to attract, wildlife like, into town, or put bears in danger, habituate them, etc. but I find that there's often this attitude of either or, you know, either we can grow food here or we can have space for, for wildlife.</p> <p>But Avni, you mentioned this during the panel that you have this feeling that the environment is separate from people here and that food is separate from the environment. When really everything is interconnected. And I think we both talked about this as being something that is difficult in this place. And then of course, underlying all of these issues, there's a lot of systemic racism, ongoing and ongoing colonialism, which means that particular communities and people experience far more marginalization and oppression within Bow Valley food systems and broader food systems, as well than those in more privileged positions.</p>
CS	<p>That's great. Okay, so during the event, the panellists were asked about some of the ways that we might address food system challenges and injustices. And I wondered if you could share an example from your very vast experience and work, about how to approach some of the problems that we've talked about and that were raised in the panel.</p> <p>Lauren, should we start with you?</p>
LK	<p>I think that the work of groups like the Filipino Organisation of the Rocky Mountains, or FORM, is a really good example.</p>

	<p>Jun was a panellist at the event and he talked about forms work, delivering ayuda, as well as coming together and celebrating through like potlucks and community meals. And from what has been shared with me, my understanding is that ayuda is a form of reciprocity, of help and support. And in this context, in the Bow Valley, it's meant that FORM, or the Filipino Organisation of the Rocky Mountains, delivers culturally appropriate food aid both to fellow community, fellow Filipino community members as well as anybody who's in need in the Valley.</p>
CS	<p>Here's some of what Jun had to say.. unfortunately his mic wasn't working brilliantly but we wanted to include his thoughts.</p>
JC	<p>We migrated to Canada in 2013. I started organizing the Filipino community in the Bow Valley, particularly in Banff, for, the year 2016. As a volunteer until now, Volunteer. So, after that, we are being threatened by the pandemic. We think of what we are doing in the Philippines during, you know, Philippines is being struck by typhoon or cyclone about 30 typhoons in every year, an average of 30. Being in the forefront of the, Pacific Ocean. So, we are giving, you know, if, a certain village we call that 'barangay' is being flooded or being almost wiped out by those typhoons, we are giving free food packs and we call that ayuda.</p> <p>So, we think of that blending what we will be doing during that pandemic. We give ayudas, not only for Filipino but, to all those who are in need with particular, moment. With close coordination, of course, with food bank, Food Alliance and the town of Banff.</p>
LK	<p>And so, I think this idea and this action of doing community-based work 'by community for community' is really essential to thinking about how we create more just, and sustainable food systems. And when FORM delivers these food packages, you know, people don't have to fill out a form to get the food. They don't have to stand in line at the food bank. People just send a text, it's very relational. I know there's lots of WhatsApp groups and messaging, and so they connect with one another and, and then FORM really intentionally delivers culturally appropriate food for in particular for Filipino community members.</p> <p>And, and I think, you know, this is in recognition that it's not just about having enough food to eat, it's about food as a way to gather together. It's about food as a connection to your soul, to your home, to your place. That food is really important, in many different ways, including for like mental health as well as for, for physical health. And then, you know, FORM also has done all this amazing work bringing together people around food and building connections and celebrating community on a lot of scales. So, whether it's having a small meeting</p>

	at somebody's house and having awesome food there or planning, they recently planned this very large picnic at Cascade Ponds in Banff that invited everyone from far and near to eat Filipino foods together. And at, it's always a fabulous event. I think this is the second year that they hosted it.
CS	Jun also discussed what he thinks needs to change in order to build food justice in his community...
JC	That's why a while ago there's a conversation that whatever policy in a certain community, it should, emanate from the community itself because they are the one most affected right? So, the conversation must be open to them. And whatever the problems, culturally, they can widen on that
CS	<p>So, the work that FORM does is at the community-level, and Jun believes that policy needs to come from the ground up.</p> <p>Switching to another panellist, we also heard from Dr. Tatenda Mambo about regenerative agriculture as a bottom-up movement and the challenges of translating this into policy</p>
TM	I think the voices that tend to dominate the conversation are those that are large and have a lot of lobbying, um, momentum behind them. I think the beautiful thing about regen ag is that it's mostly been a grassroots movement. So, people who are adopting it largely do it because they themselves have had, a change of heart, or a change of perspective. And I think fundamentally that's more important than the government taking a particular position on something. I think you need to first have people change their relationship to how they are relating to natural systems.
CS	Lauren mentioned something that Syma Habib said in the panel
LK	And one of the things that came across for me in the, in the event or during the event was that, you know, Syma, highlighted the importance that food is emotional. It's a sense of connection and healing and relationships and that this makes it a really fertile ground for change. And that the process of eating and processing food and making food and growing food together is a key part of change.
CS	<p>Yeah, of course, I was just remembering Sima's metaphor of fermenting, and you know the idea of ideas coming together when we actually make food together but also when we discuss things. So I was just having visions of fermenting jars.</p> <p>Here's Sima:</p>

SH	<p>I think, before we take action, we need to ask ourselves from what place are we taking action from? I think a lot of our cultural response, or how do we fix this, isn't always the best way of approaching the problem. I think a lot of the work ahead of us is not about fixing or curing a problem. It's about healing from these really problematic paradigms that we exist in. And so when I think about action, I do. I do a lot of various...everything I do is connected to food in some way or another.</p> <p>But my favorite action right now is, a fermentation club that I'm working on with, with a group of sort of co-conspirators and friends. And the way I look at fermentation is that there's so much that bacterial worlds can teach us about transforming ingredients and alchemizing and shifting. And so, the action of fermenting together and coming together to work with food and to not do it in our individual homes, to not, like, look up a thing on the internet, to experiment together and not be committed to a result. The action of making something and uncorking it six months later to see what happened.</p> <p>I think those kinds of practices and actions, allow us to think about the world in a different way. And then that way of thinking or being or practicing or imagining can then form the basis of the actions that we take that maybe exist in the more linear policy world or the world of, you know, trying to convince decision makers to do things a certain way. And there are so many ways to practice together. And, and I think food is, is really special for that practice because we're able.</p> <p>We've talked about like everybody eats and food is very emotional and it's a source of connection and healing and joy and relationship for, you know, all of us. I think if we close your eyes for just a moment and thought about a favorite meal, it would be that it was in connection with others or there was something very special about the ingredients. And so, it's this very fertile ground for so many other kinds of change, that our culture so desperately needs right now. And so, yeah, I think the practice of doing, processing foods together in very traditional ways can be very just awesome!</p>
CS	<p>Can you share an example from your work or your experience about how we might approach some of the food system challenges and problems that that we've mentioned that were raised during the event?</p>
AS	<p>So, for me, like from a big picture perspective, just continuing to have these discussions. So when anyone, goes in and talks about food, I feel like there's like a seed has been planted in some way, shape or form. A lot of times that change is, is takes a very long time. But it's starting to see like, you see the world through food. So,</p>

using food as a lens to build community, which is what we named the event, and like Lauren said about mental health and all the other aspects of life.

Right now, in the Bow Valley, so for me personally, the way that I've been addressing, some challenges or more within the school food aspect. And so, I've started, hot lunch program at my kids' school. And the and I work with Damien, who's an Indigenous chef, to prepare the meals. And I source all the ingredients in a way, what I call "ethical". So just from my, knowledge of food systems as an entrepreneur, I, I source my definition of ethical that, that that could be another podcast. And then, I write an email every before every meal to the parents. So, they and sometimes they the kids, especially the older kids, get to read them about where the ingredients are sourced from or why I chose a certain ingredient. Just and again, that's just a place to create discussion. And many parents sometimes they'll.. it's inspired, group of parents to come together and volunteer for the program. So now the program actually runs without me physically there, which I think was a nice way to have community created around that. And so these are parents that don't necessarily otherwise volunteer in the school. So, it was a way to for them to see their kids during the day and just be part of the school, our school community.

And what I've learned from doing this program is that. The way in the Bow valley that we give, let's say, funding for small grassroots, projects and things like that is very institutional, like it's very you have to write a grant and you have to, like, know how to write a grant and use like, yes, now we can use ChatGPT, but it's still not the same to, you know, to go through that, that whole process of writing a grant. So it's like, I feel like the people who are in positions of governance in the Bow Valley. Are not yet ready to change the system, to allow money to flow to those who actually either have lived experience in that, whether it's a food insecurity or something, it's just it's just not there yet.

And so, for my experience, I, I have written a few grants, and the local foundation, I have not gotten money for, for that. But where I have been getting money, which I think is very interesting for this, for this, hot lunch program is from the Bow Valley Food Bank. So, and that has been not because I'm writing grants. I do send them an email with saying, you know, summary of the program with the numbers and that kind of thing. But it's because, I still don't know everyone that's on the board, but it's because they know me just as a member of the community who does food work. And to me, that is, I feel much better receiving money from them. Then I than I would even like if I had to go through the process of writing this ridiculous grant. So.. yeah.

CS	<p>And I and I think you raise the point that we can have solutions that then bring about their own obstacles and challenges around funding flows and kind of the, as you say, the governance perceptions and the need to steer the whole ship.</p> <p>So, Avni, you mentioned that, I think you actually mentioned this during the panel that there was this sense of connection, growing even just from sitting together and discussing our perspectives. And it felt like a sense of community being cultivated right there in space and time. But I wondered if you have any final thoughts about how these different issues and solutions come together.</p> <p>The panellists were asked, what does a just food system look like to you? And I wondered if you had anything to add about your visions for a just food community. And Avni, we'll start with you, if that's okay.</p>
AS	<p>I'm going to answer it like just from a really big picture perspective, because that's all I have at the moment. A just food community. Well, actually one detail would be great to have some sort of community hub, like an actual physical location where folks are gathering and having discussions and having maybe workshops or a place that they can get ethical food or whatever, whatever it may be.</p> <p>And, so yeah, so from a big picture perspective of having a just food future would be to continue having these discussions and, and all of us who are involved, getting paid somehow to have these discussions instead of just like having our random thinking thoughts and thinking that we are, that we're doing something when we probably are. But we're just not getting, you know, we have to also live. So... yeah. And evolving.</p> <p>I feel like a static food system is a problem, which I feel like grocery stores offer like a standard or static or consistent. I think change is, a big part of where humanity needs to start really, like part of climate adaptation and all those kinds of things are the foundation of that, I feel, is that we have to have the ability to adapt and change quickly. Because the climate is and so will our food. Because one year, there's just going to be no wheat. Then what?</p>
CS	<p>So, during the panel, Melissa really brought home some of the connections between the food system crises that Avni was discussing there, and colonial dispossession, and that we need to have an eye on both the past and the future as we reckon with the present.</p>

MWM	<p>Yeah, what does a just food system mean? And for me... I started to kind of get a bit overwhelmed because I've been so focused in language work and in Kwakiutl, and it's a different way of being and seeing and relating. So, to come back and sit on a panel and we talk about more of the complexities, the policies, the more of the systems and institutions I was really thinking about, how do I see myself in this conversation?</p> <p>And for me, I was looking at currently in the environments and the lands that have been holding me for the last seven months and my language journey there, and for me to really understand what a just food system is, I really liked what you were saying, Lauren earlier, is really seeing how the lands that I'm currently living on and how those food systems have been ancestrally, been holding so much of those systems in from the past and the present and the future, and sort of in order to begin this kind of conversation, it's what is my relationships to the plants and to the animals and to the places that I'm currently living.</p> <p>And so it's really interesting in Port Hardy, there's, we have one grocery store. And so, for me, that's really scary because it's, you don't have a lot of, yeah, agency or sovereignty of what you feel like you can consume and it's really. Yeah, a hard place to be because one of my major journeys of language journeys was it's been really humbling because I've really romanticized this idea of like, I'm going to move back home and I'm going to connect to my relatives and I'm going to eat ancestrally. But the reality is, a history of displacement.</p> <p>The reserve that I'm currently living on, was, the government forcefully burned down our ancestral homelands and have been amalgamated into another reserve. And then, so when I think about what the current food systems I was like, starting to research and was like, I want to see shell middens and I want to see what clam gardens look like. And I was so excited to want to see these. And then I'm like, but I'm not seeing them around me. And so, every day after school, though, I'd be walking on the beach, but then I would see all these shells around in was asking a classmate more about what these meanings are. And it's really interesting to start to see, like how much the land, if you look at it, holds those systems already, and you can see really the health and the vitality of a community in the landscape in itself.</p> <p>And so when I start to see about what it currently is, I kind of been approaching it through more of a language lens. And for me, inherently, learning Kwakiutl, it's not just about what you consume. It's a whole like mind, body and spirit, and it's a whole way of being and one of the first sentences I learned was *speaking in Kwakiutl* and it means "have you eaten breakfast?" And so a lot of this kind of introduction of learning my</p>
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	<p>language has been centred around food, and that's something that yeah, I've been really thinking about systematically, for Indigenous peoples, that was by taking about your agency and your sovereignty of what you're able to consume, to share, that's a whole way of being.</p> <p>Our culture, our understanding of ourselves. And through, my grandma and all of her siblings went to residential schools and I'm not going to get into it but seeing the histories of the malnutrition and those are all systems.. and we talk about food systems, naming a colonial food system and Indigenous food systems. Naming how currently in the topics we're talking about in Canada, it's looking at how in a modern-day context we are still very much holding and participating in a colonial food system and so when I start to think about a just food system, my reality is, it's complicated, it's layered.</p> <p>But I think for me it's more like positioning what is my relationship to the to the place and the lands have been holding me, and to the plants, and my sense of responsibility to others in this system are really just relations, this layeredness, I think.</p>
LK	<p>And I think for me, within that change, relationality is really key. And building relationships across difference, both within human and non-human communities, is really integral for creating more just food futures and food systems. And that's, as Avni said, like having these conversations is a key part of building those relationships and, and, and doing it in ways that are meaningful and not extractive and, and so on.</p> <p>And I think this importance of relationships also, you know, not only came out of the Cultivating Community event, but also this initial writing workshop that I had co-organized with Marit Rosol, Eric Holt-Gimenez and Elizabeth Vibert at the University of Calgary. And we also write about this in a recent article which argues that one of the key things for creating just food futures is building solidarity across different movements. So not just within food movements and between food movements, but across movements such as climate justice movements, Black Lives Matter movements, migrant worker justice movements, as well as Indigenous land rematriation and land movements, just to name a few.</p> <p>And I think for folks in more privileged positions like myself as a white settler person, it's really important to understand for me, from my positionality, that my agenda is not the only agenda, and perhaps it's not the most important one. And to understand the, that working in solidarity, particularly with BIPOC groups and with 2SLGBTQ plus communities, means letting go of my own agenda. And that it's really important to cede power</p>

	<p>and control and to know and to take a supporting role and you know, when to step back and when to step forward in order to be able to both listen and to also get things done when they need to get done.</p> <p>And, you know, as I mentioned previously, a key part of working in solidarity for me and working across difference is engaging with tensions that come up as a result of this work, to not ignore those tensions or try to brush them under the rug, but to use them as opportunities to learn about our differences and how we can better support one another, and that tensions are not necessarily a bad thing, right? That they can be a key part of our relationships. Right? And often they are a key part of all or all of our relations. I feel like I know that well as a as a mother to young children, who I love very much.</p> <p>And then I think one thing that Melissa talked about during the panel was that in order to understand what a just food system looks like, we need to understand what our relationships are to the plants, to the animals, and to the places in which we live, as well as to each other. And for me, understanding my relationship to and living in good relation to land, air, water, animals, and people is really central in moving towards just food futures. And, you know, to do this work, to do this work in relation, it also means that we will likely have different roles and responsibilities in creating these just food futures, depending on who we are and the different experiences and positionality that we that we come from.</p> <p>Syma was also talking about the importance of centring people and land and relationality and asking questions like, “what place are we taking action from?” And perhaps asking, you know, “how do we fix this?” Isn't the best way to go about approaching, approaching a problem. And I think that, you know, doing this from really doing this from a place of relationality, of complexity, of tension is a really key part of the work that I strive to do, at least.</p>
CS	<p>Thank you so much for the sharing this time and those words. And your relationships. We will share the article that you mentioned, Lauren, but I love how you both brought, together some of these ideas, you know, shifting away from a static and binary idea of a food system through being in movement. And I love that word being in movement. Because if you are part of a movement, the idea is that it does make you change and, and I think your event was one example of where that can happen in real time by bringing people who don't normally spend time together, together.</p>

	So, thank you for your organisational work. And unless there's anything more you'd like to add that I've missed, we can say goodbye.
AS	There's a song that's been coming up in my head lately, and when Lauren was just speaking, it's. I don't know if you know this one. It's, Fight the Power by Public Enemy. Oh, yeah.
CS	Nice, nice. Right. Okay. We'll leave with those words.
LY	Love it! "Fight the Power"  There was so much more I wish we could have added in from the panel, but hopefully folks can head to the show notes to learn more.
CS	For sure, and I'd really like to thank Dr. Lauren Kepkiewicz and Avni Soma for sitting down with us, and all of the panelists for their insights. It really was an incredible event to be a part of.
LY	Thanks for tuning in for this episode of Handpicked: Stories from the Field.  This episode was hosted and produced by us: Laine Young [and Charlie Spring].  This episode features music from Keenan Reimer-Watts
CS	Handpicked is produced with support from the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems, Wilfrid Laurier University, CIGI, and the Balsille School of International Affairs.
L	Please check out our show notes for a bibliography, teaching tools, and links to other relevant information that we used to produce this episode. Make sure you check out our website for other ways to engage with us.
CS	This episode of Handpicked was recorded on the traditional territories of the Iyârhe Nakoda Nation of the Chiniki, Bearspaw and Good Stoney, the Blackfoot Confederacy including the Siksika, Kinai, and Pikani, Tsutiina, Sukwepmuk and Tanaha and Metis Nation of AB District 4, as well as Treaty 7 territory including the Métis Nation of AB Region 3.  It was also produced on the lands of the Neutral, Anishaanabe and Haudenosaunee people. We encourage you all to check the land acknowledgement link in the show notes to learn more.  As always, I'm Charlie Spring

LY	and I'm Laine Young and this has been an episode of the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems' podcast, Handpicked.
CS	Make sure to tune in next time, for more freshly picked stories from the field.