

Deep Medicine Circle—Farming is Medicine

Envisioning Whole Systems Health Along the Urban Rural Corridor

The Deep Medicine Circle (DMC) was founded in 2020 by physician, author, composer and activist Rupa Marya to advance the concept of Whole Systems Health as the Covid pandemic exposed how colonial lines of power determined who would suffer and who would survive the impact of the novel virus. Bringing together artists, lawyers, physicians, farmers, land stewards, Indigenous Traditional Environmental Knowledge keepers, elders, youth, and learners from all disciplines, the Deep Medicine Circle works along the urban/rural corridor at two sites in occupied, unceded Ohlone lands, what is now called the San Francisco Bay Area, California. At the one acre Rooftop Medicine Farm in Oakland and the 38 acre Zucigim farm on the San Mateo Coast which is being moved back into Ohlone hands, people work together to heal the wounds of colonialism through food, medicine, storytelling, restoration and learning. We do this by repairing relationships of people to land, to one another and to the web of life that ultimately supports all.

The organization's cornerstone program is called Farming is Medicine, a local model of a food system based in principles and practices of care. The Farming is Medicine framework is replicable and adaptable, and simultaneously advances climate, social, food and health justice. Simply, the goal of the program is this: Heal the Land, Feed the People. We have grown thousands of pounds of organic fruits and vegetables for thousands of people experiencing food insecurity in the Bay Area. Our third season is underway. We have employed dozens of community members and brought together hundreds to learn alongside us in this work to envision and enact a food system based in care.

Farming is Medicine encompasses four main activities:

1. **Landback/Reasserting Indigenous Sovereignty:** We work to facilitate the return of land back to Indigenous hands, so that Ohlone people can begin the work of healing ancient relationships and practices of care for land, water and all the relatives who live in these territories. As Ohlone people come back to these practices and into their positions of knowing and being in these regions, Diasporic peoples learn to be good guests in this land and come to understand earth-bound relationships through those practices of stewardship and care that led to the biodiversity and vitality of this region prior to European conquest, genocide and economic extraction. Before Ohlone people were removed from their lands, for thousands of years, people were not unsheltered nor were they hungry. Landback work also brings forward the cultural values of Ohlone community that led to all beings thriving here. Through this healing of people to land and to one another, we advance a different model of being together on land in service of care.
2. **Farmers are Stewards of Health:** We advance an economic model where ultimately public funds pay farmers to grow food and steward thriving biodiverse ecosystems through

agroecological land management practices. We see farmers as the first line of healthcare workers, because their work creates the foundations of human health—nutrient-dense foods, rich soil biology and thriving ecosystems. We move away from an extractive model of the for-profit food system and pay our farmers not only to grow food but to steward soil and work with the earth systems to improve water retention and adapt seeds, as California encounters greater challenges with water scarcity and heat through climate change. Our farmers collectively organize their work, and receive annual professional growth stipends, personal gear stipends, health insurance and retirement benefits.

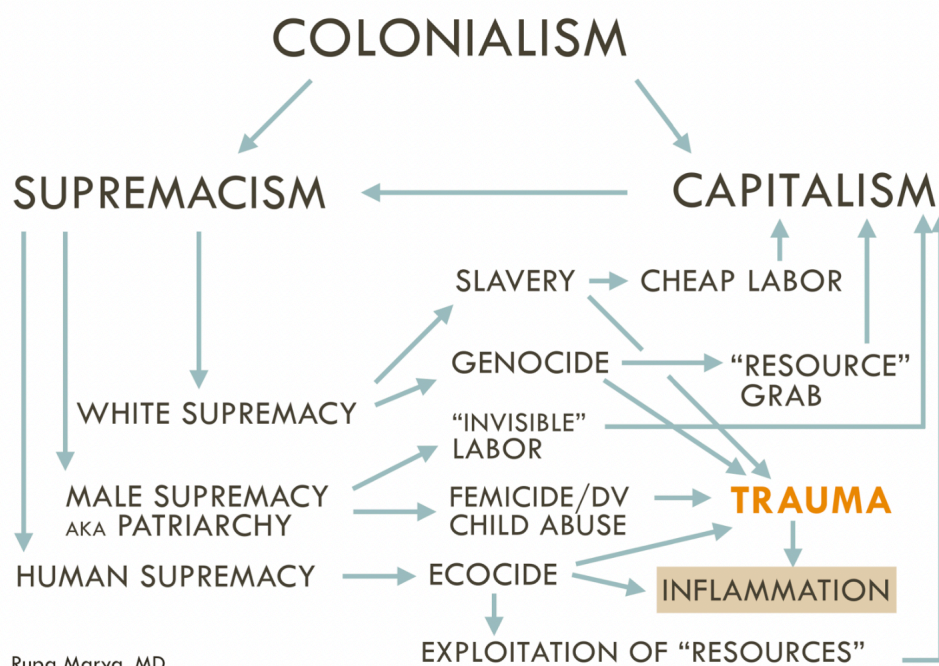
3. **Decommodify Food:** Colonialism and specifically colonial capitalism have created scarcity where the earth provides abundance. Industrial and centralized food systems have been used to shape international strategies, coerce the labor of working class people and to separate people from their relationships to land. We work to reestablish relationships of care through food by removing food from the market system and giving it to people in need. Our survey team reaches out the people who receive our foods every season to understand what foods they want our farmers to grow, giving people zero-barrier access to organic culturally relevant foods. We serve over 20 Diasporic communities, including Indigenous people who were forcibly removed from their homelands and resettled in the region by the US government. Most of the people we serve wish to eat organic foods not only for the health benefits for themselves and their families, but for the benefits to the earth and the farmers, who are not exposed to petrochemical-based fertilizers and pesticides which can damage worker health. Because market organic produce is prohibitively expensive, our food distribution pathways provide their only access to organic foods. Historically in all of our cultures, food has been used as a conduit for building relationships of care. Through the decommodification of food, we reawaken that ancient ethos.
4. **Food as Medicine:** By reawakening our duties to care for one another through food, we open the possibilities for food to be medicine again, not simply through prescriptive notions seen in colonial medicine, but through repairing our relationships to land, to one another and to the web of life. We invite community members into this active work by participating on the farms with us and learning food preparations that enhance the bioavailability and activity of the healing aspects of our nourishment. Bringing together chefs, doctors, health students, nurses, farmers, artists, teachers and youth into this learning, we are seeding the next generation of people committed to a food system that creates health for all.

Throughout every aspect of these activities is woven the work of storytelling. We understand that to change the systems that are causing suffering, we must articulate narratives and understandings of wholeness and relationality that have been disappeared from human consciousness through our current socioeconomic reality that leaves many groups of people and beings oppressed. Our storywork is shaped by artists, filmmakers, musicians, narrative medicine storytellers, activists and oral history keepers but is practiced by all of our circle, as

we dust off our own practices to bring the future forward with greater kindness and imagination.

The Farming is Medicine program is in its third year of production, and we have collected quantitative and qualitative data from the soil, water, food and people to document the impact of a food system based in care. Over the first two seasons we grew and gave away over 90,000 lbs of organic fruits and vegetables to about 2,000 households experiencing food insecurity in the Bay Area. We have employed over 20 farmers and built relationships between city governments, universities, Indigenous communities, schools, community-based organizations, and land holders to move forward this work into structural policy in local government. To date this work has been supported by generous philanthropy from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Tides Foundation, the 11th Hour Foundation, the Patagonia Foundation, Kataly Foundation and other likeminded organizations. We have also received several large public federal grants in climate smart farming and urban agroecology to implement this work. As of 2024, we have raised over \$5 million US dollars and are working on longterm public funding strategies from agriculture, health and human services and climate initiatives to make the work sustainable over the longterm.

We are currently meeting to build the nation's first public utility for food in the City of Oakland, based in these concepts and the data we have collected through our partnerships and service. Through this work, we seek to build on the legacy of the Black Panthers Party to advance an agenda of Universal Basic Nutrition in Oakland, not by providing food from the leftovers of a harmful food system but through growing a food system based in care. What we are seeing in our early analysis of our data is health, not just one of arm but of the whole system of interactions. We call this Whole Systems Health.



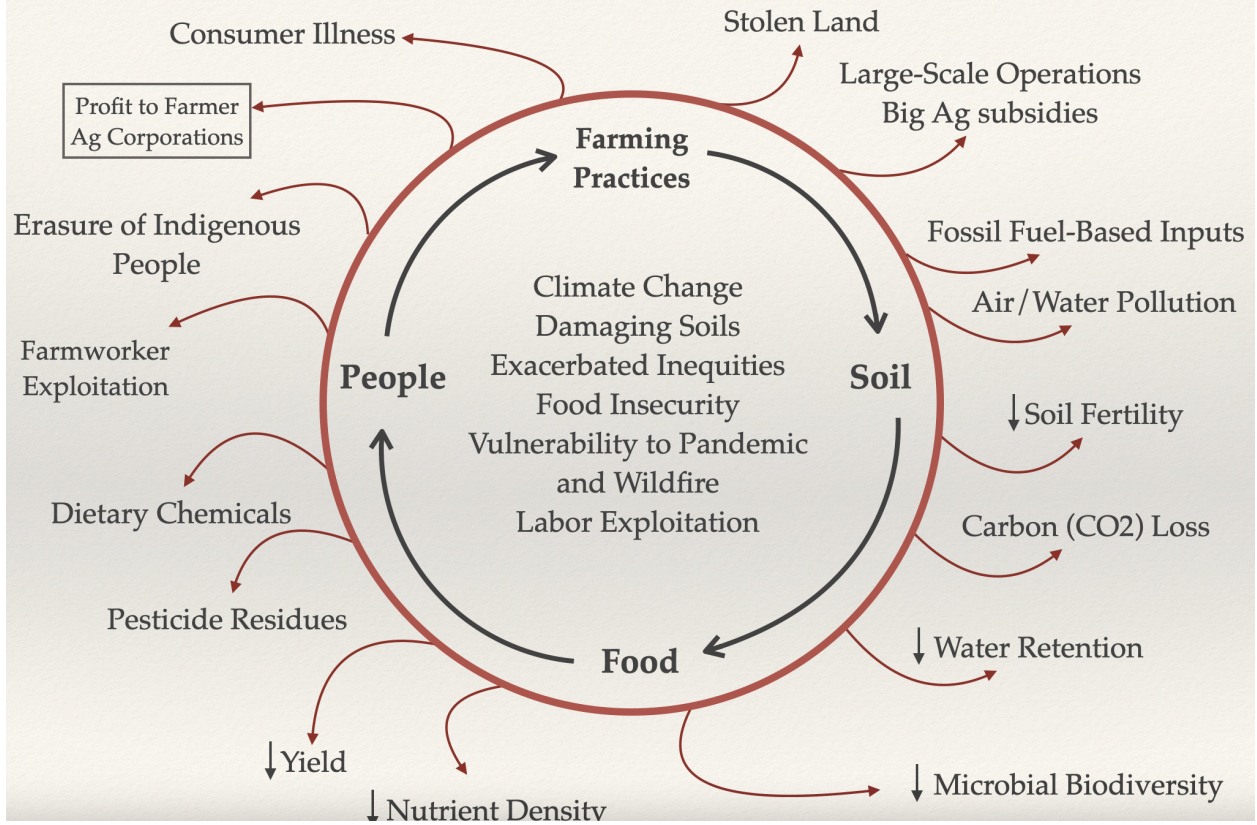


Rooftop Medicine Farm, Ohlone Territory of Huichin, Oakland

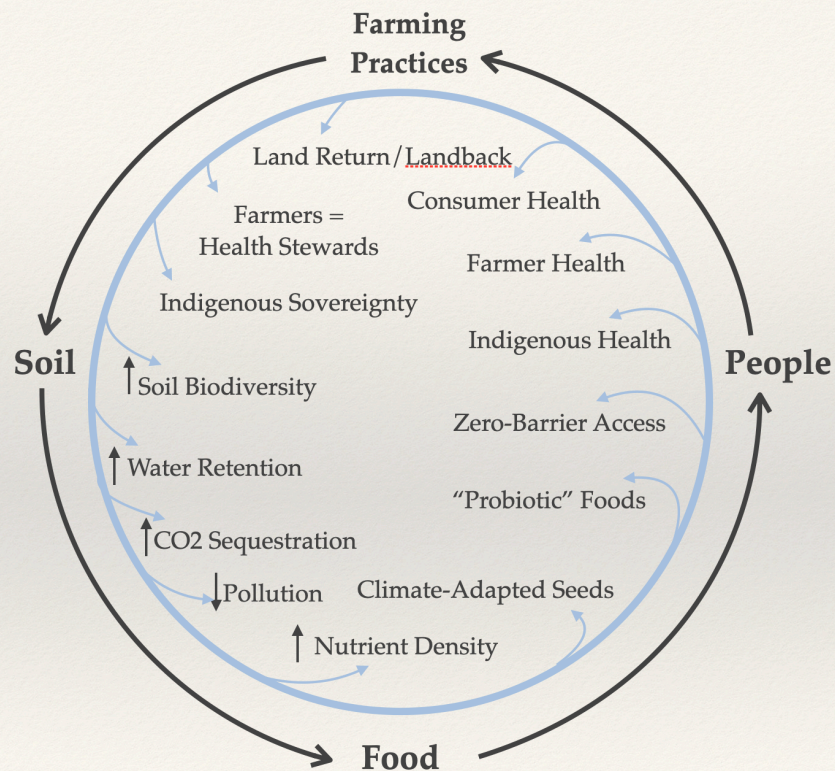


Zucigim Farm, San Mateo Coast, California

Food System Today



Farming is Medicine





Deep Medicine Circle: Farming is Medicine Logic Model

Land Back

There is and continues to be erasure of Indigenous ways of knowing, imagining, and stewarding land, food and medicine, which is critical at this time as these ways have been demonstrated to be superior in stewarding the ecologies and biodiversity that mitigate climate change and social upheaval. Current Regenerative Agriculture discourse ignores political and historical dynamics and recreates colonial capitalist frameworks of land occupation and food enslavement.

Our ultimate goal is the return of all stolen land to Indigenous people and the reframing of culture based on principles of care, reciprocity and reintegration of humanity in the web of life. We can make progress by returning land, people, and ecosystems to Indigenous leadership. This supports Indigenous culture and values, ecosystem health, and heals relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Farmers as Health Stewards

Conventional agriculture damages workers, soil, air and water health, lowers nutrient density of foods, and releases organic matter into CO2. By farming with Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge and agroecological practices, farmers can steward the health of people and land.

Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other People of Color have been historically removed from positions of leadership in farming and land stewardship. Our farms place BIPOC farmers back in positions of leadership and enable BIPOC community members to pursue careers in food production and land stewardship.

With farmers as stewards of health—of people, seeds, water and soil—we bridge the urban-rural gap by moving knowledge, stories, seeds, people and food between these spaces, weaving together resources that improve wellness of each place.

Decommodify Food

Farmers are currently trapped by the commercial food system that enslaves food to coerce labor of people made vulnerable by colonial capitalism. Separating farming from capital reduces farmer stress and allows time to restore farm ecologies and the production of food as medicine. Our goal is that all people are reintegrated into web of relationships that supports whole systems health.

Food is Medicine

Health is an emergent phenomenon of systems working in balance together. It is a characteristics of systems, not simply of individuals. Our broken relationships to land, each other and the web of life results in poor health.

We distribute food grown at our farms at no cost to community members made vulnerable by colonial capitalism. We also offer trainings for community members in food and medicine preparation.

Food and medicine were historically coextensive, but have been separated — healthcare workers have no understanding of food systems, nutrition and health. We offer workshops to healthcare workers to support understanding of food as medicine.

