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Reflections on 10 years of *An Annotated Bibliography on Structural Racism Present in the U.S. Food System*

Rachel E. Kelly [a] *
Michigan State University

Rich Pirog [b]
Holt, Michigan

M. Jahi Johnson-Chappell [c]
Michigan State University

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Abstract

This paper is a reflective essay from the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) on 10 years of writing and updating *An Annotated Bibliography on Structural Racism Present in the U.S. Food System* (ABSR). The ABSR provides a literature compilation of research, outreach, and opinion on structural racism in the U.S. food system for the practitioner, researcher, educator, and advocate. The authors of this paper provide a comprehensive overview of the ABSR, detailing its purpose, value, applications, and evolution. They also explain how the ABSR has been integrated into CRFS's ongoing racial equity efforts. This publication concludes with learnings, outcomes, and opportunities that have emerged from the development and utilization of the ABSR.

Keywords

annotated bibliography, structural racism, equity, food justice, food systems, food sovereignty, systemic racism, race

[a] * *Corresponding author:* Rachel E. Kelly, MS, Senior Resource and Research Development Specialist, Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems; 303 Natural Resources, 480 Wilson Road; East Lansing, MI 48824 USA; +1-517-353-3535; kellyra2@msu.edu; https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9321-6133

[b] Rich Pirog, MS, Former Director, Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems; and Consultant; 2792 DellRidge Drive; Holt, MI 48842 USA; richpirog@gmail.com

[c] M. Jahi Johnson-Chappell, PhD, Director, Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems, and Professor and W.K. Kellogg Foundation Endowed Chair, Department of Community Sustainability; 302 Natural Resources, 480 Wilson Road; East Lansing, MI 48824 USA; chappe17@msu.edu; https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8542-1610

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Introduction

An Annotated Bibliography on Structural Racism Present in the U.S. Food System (ABSR), authored by the Michigan State University (MSU) Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS), provides a literature compilation of research, outreach, and opinion on structural racism in the food system for the practitioner, researcher, educator, and advocate (Kelly et al., 2025). The ABSR is focused on structural racism literature across and within all sectors of the U.S. food system. Annotated bibliographies on important food system topics are often developed as one-time projects, and many are not maintained or updated over time. Examples include bibliographies focused on food hubs and values-based food supply chains (Lerman et al., 2012) and local food systems in community and economic development (Smith, 2016). In contrast, CRFS has made a long-term commitment to the ABSR, now in its 11th edition and containing more than 725 citations.

The ABSR identifies literature that links the social construction of Whiteness (Guess, 2006) and its intentional or consequential impact on structural racism in the U.S. food system. It includes works that explore a variety of topics, including unequal access to land, capital, markets, and decision-making power for Black and Brown farmers, higher rates of food insecurity and poorer health outcomes for communities of color, food sovereignty and efforts by Indigenous communities to reclaim cultural foodways, conditions for food and agricultural laborers, and more. The breadth, volume, and continuity of the ABSR provides a unique opportunity to reflect—in particular, through this publication—on its history and evolution, as well as on the process of researching, curating, publishing, and promoting the resource. This article will highlight learnings, outcomes, and opportunities that have emerged from the development and utilization of the ABSR. The authors have attempted throughout to use terms that are respectful, adequately descriptive, inclusive, and have a level of acceptance by the groups in question themselves. However, we recognize that all such terms have limits, exclusions, and contentions around them, and that terminology used to describe characteristics like race, ethnicity, and gender is always evolving.

Structural Racism

Structural racism has been defined as the "normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics—historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal—that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color" (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004, p. 1). Structural racism is an especially pernicious form of racism because of how embedded it is in our society. Braveman et al. (2022) write:

> Racial inequities, and their ensuing socioeconomic and health consequences, persist because of deeply rooted, unfair systems that sustain the legacy of former overtly discriminatory practices, policies, laws, and beliefs. At times, these systems and structures, which are rooted in beliefs in White supremacy, operate unconsciously or unintentionally, but nevertheless effectively, to produce and sustain racial discrimination. (p. 172)

It is worth noting that the terms *structural racism* and *systemic racism* are often used interchangeably; however, some scholars explicitly use *systemic* racism to refer to racism present within whole systems (in the case of the ABSR, the U.S. food system), whereas they may use *structural* racism to refer to the structures (policies, practices, etc.) that have been put in place to perpetuate racism within those systems (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Braveman et al., 2022). The use of the term *institutional* (or *institutionalized*) racism is often used to include both the systems *and* the structures that exacerbate racism in institutions (Braveman et al., 2022). For this article, the authors have opted to mainly use the term *structural* racism for consistency, with the "system" of focus being the U.S. food system.

One well-documented example of structural racism that has impacted the food system, among many other systems, is what is called "redlining." Historic redlining, which began in the early 1930s, targeted Black and minority neighborhoods through discriminatory lending practices, making it harder for people of color to secure mortgages (Lynch et al., 2021; Rothstein, 2017). The term "redlining" refers to the color codes used by the federal government to designate which areas were

too high risk to insure homeowners' mortgages—areas where people of color lived, or lived nearby, were colored red (Gross, 2017). According to the Federal Reserve History (2023), when the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) began its operations in 1934, "FHA staff concluded that no loan could be economically sound if the property was located in a neighborhood that was or could become populated by Black people, as property values might decline over the life of the 15- to 20-year loans they were attempting to standardize" (para. 3). The practice of redlining was explicitly condoned by the federal government as well as state and local governments. Moreover, its impacts are still evident today, as Black and other minoritized residents still experience higher rates of poverty and other inequalities (Butler et al., 2020; Gross, 2017; Swope et al., 2025). Even a "molehill of bias creates a mountain of disadvantage" (Valian, 1998, p. 54).

Housing segregation has resulted in communities where, among other outcomes, residents may have decreased access to healthy, fresh, affordable food options due to lack of an enabling food environment—with particular attention often (and somewhat controversially) focused on nearby food retail stores (Bower et al., 2014; Healthy Food Policy Project, 2022, pp. 14–23). These neighborhoods have been referred to as "food deserts" because of their sparsity of fresh food options (Ver Ploeg et al., 2011); however, critics argue the term "food apartheid" is more appropriate, as it "accounts for the idea the food inequity is not a natural occurrence based in ecological limits, but rather an explicit outcome of political economy based in structural racism and unequal geographies of access" (Joyner et al., 2022, p. 68; see also Healthy Food Policy Project, 2022; and work on structural and social determinants of health, e.g., Odoms-Young et al., 2024). Residents in these communities also experience higher rates of food insecurity and hunger (Flores-Lagunes et al., 2024; Li & Yuan, 2022). These dynamics contribute to significant public health disparities in the U.S., as residents in neighborhoods with limited access to healthy foods are more likely to suffer from diet-related diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease (Neff et al., 2009).

Structural racism manifests in other ways throughout the food system as well. In the food and agriculture industry, for example, racial and ethnic minorities make up a disproportionately large percentage of the workforce but face higher rates of discrimination, which can lead to poor physical and mental health and greater economic disadvantages (Yearby et al., 2023). There are well-documented examples of this discrimination in the restaurant industry, where servers and kitchen staff are subject to low wages as well as poor working conditions and harassment (Food Chain Workers Alliance, 2012; Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, 2013). Farmworkers, many of whom are immigrant laborers, may face unsafe working conditions, including high levels of exposure to pesticides and harmful agricultural chemicals (Ferguson et al., 2019), exposure to health- and life-threatening heat conditions (Federation of American Scientists, 2024), and higher risk of injury in dangerous industries, such as dairy farming (Keller et al., 2017). Migrant farmworkers are particularly vulnerable to working in such conditions because the threat of deportation makes many feel that they have no choice but to endure their circumstances (De Genova, 2002).

Another example of structural racism in the food system is how access to farmland for farmers and producers of color has been inhibited by the federal government. There is considerable evidence of the USDA's discriminatory lending practices against Black farmers and other groups (see USDA Equity Commission, 2024), such as denying farmers credit or access to other government support (Balvanz et al., 2011; Gilbert et al., 2002; Wallace et al., 2026). This has made it more difficult for Black farmers to purchase or keep land, affecting their livelihoods as well as those of future generations of family farmers. Going back further in history, the colonization of Indigenous lands continues to significantly affect the food systems of Indigenous communities, such as through losing traditional knowledge for growing and harvesting food and dealing with the impacts of climate change (Malli et al., 2023).

The generational impact of structural racism is stark. The U.S. food system is an excellent example of how public and private institutions have for cen-

turies upheld racist policies and practices that continue to disadvantage people of color in this country. The resources in the ABSR provide many more examples of how racism manifests in food systems and, more significantly, how we can work to dismantle it.

Food Systems

It is important to clarify that the title of the ABSR includes the phrase "U.S. food *system*," but there is not one singular food system in the U.S., or anywhere. Rather, food systems are complex networks made up of a "range of actors … involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded" (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2018, para. 1). Moreover, they are shaped, at least in significant part, by federal, state, and local policies that have historically "entrenched patterns of power, norms, and behaviors [that exist] … at the expense of the public's health, farmers' economic independence, and the long-term capacity to sustain productive and biodiverse agricultural systems" (Shannon et al., 2015, p. 162).

Food systems are also geographically distinct and dynamic—even within the same region or locality—so it is crucial not to draw definitive conclusions about structural racism in food systems within the U.S. and beyond based on the citations included in the ABSR, but, rather, to use it as a starting point: as one resource to inform respectful inquiry in specific places and times. Solutions to food system problems vary by place, meaning that the most effective food systems transformations require innovative place-based frameworks that consider the interplay of environmental, economic, and social factors (Sonnino & Milbourne, 2022). An additional, and particularly important point was made by one of our anonymous reviewers:

> Given the deeply embedded nature of racism in the food system, the notion of "solutions" should be approached with care, with attention to scholarship—highlighted in the ABSR—that calls for substantial restructuring of the food system rather than simply "solution" oriented responses that too often address symptoms (i.e.[,] hunger) rather than root causes (i.e.[,] racism). (See also Guthman's (2024) broader critique of food system "solutionism.")

Origins and Conceptualization of the ABSR

The vision of CRFS is for a "thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the country, and the planet through food systems rooted in local regions and centered on food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable" (Center for Regional Food Systems, n.d.-a, para. 1). Food systems are essential to understanding and making progress towards racial equity, and vice versa. People of color in the U.S. have had their labor, knowledge, and skills exploited by the institution of chattel slavery, as migrant workers, and as indentured servants to produce, harvest, and process food and fiber for the benefit of wealthy business owners and the public. CRFS's focus on racial equity stems from a belief, buttressed by our research, that racism creates "ever-present barriers to an equitable food system" and that only by dismantling the "barriers, procedures, and policies that harm people of color [can we] achieve a food system [wherein] everyone can access healthy food, the land to grow that food, and other resources needed to supply healthy food" (Center for Regional Food Systems, 2021, "Why Embed," para. 2–4). Credit for advancing this conversation on racial equity should also be extended to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), one of CRFS's funders. WKKF and other food systems funders have increasingly recognized the absolute necessity of supporting a more diverse and equitable range of food systems practitioners, and have actively encouraged food systems organizations to use a racial equity lens in their work (e.g., Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders, n.d.-a).

CRFS committed to initial steps in its racial equity journey in 2014. Individual CRFS staff, including Center leadership, had participated in various racial equity workshops and experiences over the previous years, and the consensus that emerged among staff was a need to integrate equity

across all internal and external workings of CRFS. Internal discussions that followed led to planning and implementing a racial equity retreat in 2015. During this same period, CRFS led a Michigan-based Food Hub Network of regional food distributors working to support local food economies. To guide the network, CRFS staff used resources from a partner organization's annotated bibliography that focused on resourcing food hubs and values-based food supply chains (Lerman et al., 2012). The bibliography sparked the idea for a new resource exploring the intersection of racial equity and food systems. The concept was discussed among CRFS staff and several Michigan-based and national food system leaders during the development of the Center's racial equity plan. With strong support and positive feedback, the ABSR became one of the primary strategic actions in the CRFS racial equity plan.

The rationale for the ABSR was intentional and straightforward: CRFS sought to align its organizational mission, the broader mission of Michigan State University, and the aspiring goals of its nascent racial equity plan. The ABSR was to be both an academic resource that encouraged scholarship and a strategic action to foster equitable food systems change. An interesting point, however, arose after the publication of the first edition. As we have stated, the motivation to create the ABSR sprang largely from CRFS's own perception of the need for it, alongside growing university-level commitments to diversity and the encouragement by some prominent funders. But the fact that we received some comments after the first edition that questioned why we were doing it, and that it was a stretch to claim that there was significant structural racism in the U.S. food system, reinforced the need for a resource like the ABSR in the first place.

Solicitation and Selection Process of the ABSR

The ABSR is a compilation of peer- reviewed and gray literature materials that are national, regional, and local in scope.[1] The ABSR also includes published doctoral dissertations and master's theses as well as certain video resources. Blog entries, social media posts, podcasts, and news articles are not included due to their considerable volume. However, these materials contribute significantly to the discussion on structural racism in the food system and thus should be recognized as part of the relevant public discourse.

The ABSR has, in most cases, been updated annually using two strategies. First, a call for resources is sent to national listservs and other food system practitioners and researchers who are willing to post a request for resources on their websites or social media pages. Suggested citations are accepted for a set period (typically, two to three months) and reviewed to ensure they meet simple criteria—they must address race *and* food systems, the content must pertain (at least in part) to U.S. food systems, and they must be an accepted type of literature/media, as previously described. Citation suggestions can be sent to the ABSR authors via email or, as of the 10th edition, via a Google form used to collect responses.[2] There is no limit on the number of citations someone can submit.

Second, CRFS staff and research assistants conduct searches for new resources using a curated list of food- and agriculture-related journals and organizations as a basis, along with a list of key words to systematically search journals, academic search engines, and the MSU Library.

The list of journals referenced for searching has grown with each edition of the ABSR, as has the list of key words. Examples of key word searches include structural racism, racism and food systems, Black farmers, Indigenous food systems, food sovereignty, farm workers, and food justice.

[1] Gray literature (or grey literature) is the general name for scholarly or substantive information produced outside traditional academic publishing and distribution channels, and includes technical reports, working papers, evaluation reports, conference proceedings, issue briefs, and publications from national and international nongovernmental organizations, think tanks and policy institutes.

[2] The Google form, which was accessible via CRFS's ABSR webpage and hyperlinked in the email request for citations, was a simple form to facilitate collecting resources. It included fields for contributors to add the following information about their suggested resource(s): author(s) of publication, title of publication, URL to locate the resource, and the contributor's name and email (optional) for follow-up questions. In 2022 we received 36 responses of suggested citations for the 10th edition, and in 2024 we received 69 responses for the 11th edition.

At the time of this publication, the list of keywords in the on-line research management program Zotero numbered over a thousand. The authors are currently working on condensing the keywords to make them more consistent and useful. For example, keywords such as "agricultural land," "farmland," and "land" will be combined into one tag, and a corresponding key will be developed to help users decipher which search terms to use.

Co-authors of the ABSR

An important benefit of the ABSR that came to be understood as invaluable, while not intentional at the outset, has been providing a racial equity-oriented learning experience for its authors. Across all editions, undergraduate and graduate students and post-graduate fellows interested in racial equity considerations in the food system have been engaged to search and identify appropriate literature for the ABSR. Some of these co-authors have been part of MSU's Science Research Opportunities Program (SROP), which aims to help underrepresented undergraduate students prepare for graduate study through an intensive research experience. CRFS staff have provided both guidance and mentorship for these students and fellow co-authors, and worked with them to identify appropriate resources, develop annotations, and format citations.

Two previous authors of the ABSR shared the following statements about what they learned from their experience working on the ABSR and what they think its value is to writers, educators, and researchers. Kimberly Carr, co-author for the 8th edition, stated:

> The bibliographic experience highlighted the importance and marriage of academic research and measurement, as well as a call to action for food system practitioners, encompassing advocacy, policy, and practice. The value of the bibliography is ever timelier as it relates to visibility, resilience, and the action needed for an "All of Us" approach to a more people-centered, systems-change-oriented food system. (Personal communication, April 7, 2025)

Sydnie Burnstein, co-author for the 10th and 11th editions, shared:

> While working on the annotated bibliography, I quickly recognized its role as a curated activist space where scholars intently record, reckon with, and reimagine our food systems. Altogether, the sources form a collective case study that captures the legacy of state-sanctioned violence, exposing how racism is entrenched in the policies, institutions, and everyday operations of the U.S. food system. It is a critical tool for writers, educators, and researchers seeking to employ an anti-racist praxis within their scholarship and advocacy. (Personal communication, April 22, 2025)

Applications of the ABSR

Since its inception, the ABSR's intended uses have been to help food system researchers, writers, practitioners, and activists learn about structural racism in the U.S. food system and to support and ground their written or spoken work within the relevant scholarly literature. As one food systems scholar-practitioner summarizes, the ABSR "brings together the wisdom produced by responsible knowledge producers to empower individuals and communities to reckon with structures, systems, and institutions" (N. Didla, personal communication, July 15, 2025). Over the past ten years, CRFS has heard from other food systems practitioners about some of the ways the ABSR has been useful. The authors of this paper obtained the following examples through personal communication or through in-depth internet searches for mentions of the ABSR.

As an educational resource for those interested in the intersectional work of racial equity and the food system

Based on an internet search conducted in early 2025, more than 75 national, state, and city-based nonprofit organizations, government agencies, foundations, food and farm businesses, religious groups, authors, journalists, researchers, educators, students, and consultants have listed the ABSR as a resource link on their websites. Some examples of organizations include Marbleseed, a nonprofit committed to supporting farmers transitioning toward sustainable, organic farming systems, Food Tank, a convening organization that seeks to edu-

cate and collaborate with local partners to amplify on-the-ground solutions, The Food Literacy Project, a nonprofit that provides farm-based food, nutrition, and environmental education to youth and the broader community, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, an alliance of grassroots organizations advocating for federal policies that support sustainable agriculture, food systems, natural resources, and rural communities, and North American Food Systems Network, a professional association that provides networking opportunities, resources, career guidance, and leadership opportunities for strengthening local and regional food systems.

As a resource tool for authors writing about equity issues in the food system

Book, periodical, and manuscript authors—including graduate students—use the ABSR to inform their publications. Authors also use the ABSR as a resource to develop presentations that focus on structural racism in the food system or closely related topics.

As an educational resource in classroom teaching and research

College instructors have used ABSR citations for class assignments or in-class exercises. For example, the ABSR was used as a resource in a graduate-level class in MSU's Department of Community Sustainability.

As evidence of academic scholarship for inclusion in a faculty or staff promotion packet

Interestingly, several researchers and educators have documented, on their websites and academic promotional packets, their included citation(s) in the ABSR as evidence of the popularity and/or proof of readership of their publication(s). This includes figures at institutions such as University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, American University, and University of California-Berkeley.

As a resource to support an organization's own racial equity journey

The ABSR has been used as support material in service of several organizations' internal racial equity work, including university Cooperative Extension, policy centers, food policy councils, and religious organizations.

Evolution of the ABSR

Since the first edition of the ABSR was completed in 2015, the authors have implemented changes to make it more inclusive, accessible, and useful. CRFS has gathered feedback with the release of each edition, which with the authors' learnings have led to adjustments in updating and formatting the ABSR. The following section provides an overview of some of the significant ways the ABSR has evolved over the past decade.

Early Feedback Widens Racial and Ethnic Breadth of Citations

Many publications cited in the first ABSR edition examined structural racism toward Black people in the U.S. food system. Feedback on the first edition influenced, in subsequent editions, a broadened search and identification of peer-reviewed and gray literature covering racial disparities and structural racism directed toward Native Americans, other Indigenous peoples, and those of Asian and Latine descent. Additional publications were identified that shared foodway stories of Native Americans before and during European colonization, including their forced removal to reservations and how the change to a more highly processed Western diet adversely affected their health. Similarly, more literature was identified that examined disparities throughout the food system toward Asian and Latine immigrants. Through this evolution, the ABSR itself has become a more inclusive and representative resource, demonstrating its role as an active/living document that responds to community feedback and deepens our collective understanding of structural racism in the food system.

Changes to Improve Accessibility, Tracking, and Utility

Since the third edition, the authors of the ABSR have included the digital object identifier (DOI) of publications whenever possible. The DOI is useful for tracking electronic documents. With the fifth edition, the ABSR became available on Zotero, a free, online open-source management tool for collecting, managing, and citing publication sources.

Zotero provides users with an easy way to collect, organize, annotate, cite, and share literature, also enabling users to search for resources using keywords or tags. With the inclusion of Zotero, CRFS staff received feedback from authors of books and articles stating that the tool made the ABSR more accessible and useful.

Video Resources and Webinars

As feedback on the early editions of the ABSR accumulated, it became clear that limiting citations to print materials did not fully capture the range of media documenting food system structural racism. And although the written word has been and still is the "coin of the realm" in how academic institutions communicate and measure success, other forms of communication are also important for various communities, cultures, and individuals (Bentley, 2006; Latour & Woolgar, 1986). In response, the search for citations in the fifth edition of the ABSR was intentionally broadened to include video recordings, mainly films, documentaries, and TED Talks, that focus on the spoken word and visual communication.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic shifted most learning opportunities, trainings, and presentations onto virtual platforms such as webinars (Karl et al., 2022). At the same time, the murder of George Floyd in Minnesota catalyzed a national reckoning with racial injustice in the U.S. (Engelhardt & Kam, 2025), including a shift in rhetoric around race and racism at American higher education institutions (Grace et al., 2022; Toraif et al., 2023). During the process of updating the ABSR in 2020, the authors discovered webinars from higher education institutions that focused on structural racism found in the U.S. food system. Recognizing the significance of these timely and widely accessible resources, the ABSR team began including webinar recordings in the seventh edition, released in 2020. Since then, webinars have typically comprised at least half of the new video citations added in each update of the ABSR.

Growing Number of Citations

After 2020, the number of new resources added to each updated edition increased significantly. As noted above, the authors cite two pivotal events—the murder of George Floyd and the COVID-19 pandemic—that may have contributed to the substantial increase in new resources. Table 1 shows the growth in the number of resources for each edition. For example, in the year between the 7th edition (January 2020) and 8th edition (January 2021), there were 106 new resources added—the highest number of new additions up to that point. And in the three and a half years between the

Table 1. Number of Included Citations from First to Eleventh Edition

Edition	Year Published	Total # New Resources Added	Percentage Change in # of Resources	Overall Total by Edition [a]
1	2015 (April) [b]	—	—	32
2	2015 (June)	17	53%	49
3	2016 (Jan.)	22	45%	71
4	2017 (Feb.)	56	79%	127
5	2017 (Dec.)	56	44%	183
6	2019 (Jan.)	50	27%	233
7	2020 (Jan.)	56	24%	289
8	2021 (Jan.)	106	37%	395
9	2022 (Mar.)	125	32%	520
10	2023 (July)	143	28%	663
11	2025 (Jan.)	92	14%	755

[a] The overall totals by edition are approximate and reflect the sum of the total number of new resources added to the overall total of the previous edition. Over the years, however, resources have been removed from the ABSR during the updating process if they are no longer available online. This pertains mostly to resources without a DOI, such as gray literature, and webinar recordings. Thus, the overall total by edition count is slightly lower than what appears on this table. The 11th edition currently has 728 resources.

[b] The original edition was published in April 2015 and revised shortly after, in June 2015, to include a more expansive set of citations (see "Early Feedback Widens Racial and Ethnic Breadth of Citations" section).

release of the 7th edition (January 2020) and the 10th edition (July 2023), the number of resources in the ABSR nearly doubled, from 298 to 585.

Peer-reviewed literature on structural racism in the U.S. food system has also grown rapidly since 2015 in its diversity of topics, authorship, place-centeredness, and publication origin. This literature can be found in journals beyond those focused on agriculture and/or food, including journals that focus on policy, education, sociology, planning, law, psychology, anthropology, gastronomy, equity, culture, climate, ecology, geography, health, nutrition, medicine, nursing, and epidemiology. (See Appendix A for a complete list of journals that have resources listed in the ABSR through the 11th edition.) While further analysis is needed to explore the content of the new additions in depth and identify broad trends, it is clear that scholarship in this area continues to expand.

Addition of Themes

The 11th and most recent edition of the ABSR has a significant update from previous editions—the citations are organized into themes. As of this writing, there are over 725 citations in the ABSR. Given the volume of citations, the lead authors determined a need to categorize resources by theme to make it more accessible. As a Michigan food systems policy and planning professor noted, "Having [the ABSR] organized into themes and annotated is an extra plus so that users can quickly scan sub-topics that are of interest to them and get a quick sense of the resources before downloading the entire publication" (L. Hoey, personal communication, June 2025).

The themes were developed by reviewing the full scope of resources in the ABSR. The authors proposed 14 categories that best fit the existing resources, based on their collaborative qualitative judgement (Table 2). CRFS colleagues familiar with the ABSR were asked to review the categories and provide feedback, which was then implemented by the lead authors. The authors acknowledge that as the scholarship and advocacy on exposing food system racism continues to develop, and as we continue to receive feedback, the themes selected may change.

In the ABSR, each theme includes additional context and key terminology to help users understand the category. For example, for the theme *Activism: Frameworks, Reflection & Tools*, the following description and key terms are included:

> Description: Works that examine and or critique the role of activism, either deliberate activist frameworks, alternative food initiatives, or tools and reflections from activists
>
> Key terms: Activist critiques; alternative food activism; food justice; food sovereignty; tools for activism

Outcomes, Learnings, and Opportunities

The ABSR has created opportunities for CRFS to broaden its racial equity work through both external collaborations and internal actions. This final

Table 2. Themes and Number of Resources in Each Category [a]

Theme	#	Theme	#
Activism: Frameworks, Reflection, & Tools	74	Health, Wellness, & Nutrition	59
Agricultural Production & Food Systems Labor	124	Historical Patterns, Practice, & Trends	63
Cultural Foodways & Storytelling	82	Identity Politics & Experiences	75
Economic Impacts & Markets	75	Land: Loss, Access, & Rights	22
Educational Institutions & Extension Services	45	Local Policy: Analysis, Tools, & Organized Activism	96
Federal Policy & Governance: Action, Effects, & Analysis	36	Models, Frameworks, & Theory	110
Food Assistance & Public Assistance Programs	32	Place, Location, & Community- based Experiences	90

[a] A substantial number of citations were assigned two themes, so counts do not reflect the overall total number of citations in the ABSR.

section explores key outcomes, as well as learnings and insight gained from updating the ABSR. It concludes with opportunities for further exploration.

ABSR and Cooperative Extension's Role in Civil Dialogue on Racism

MSU is a land-grant university—an educational institution that was designated by Congress or by its state legislature to receive the benefits of the 1862 and 1890 Morrill Acts, or the 1994 Equity in Educational Land Grant Status Act.[3] The original mission of the 1862 Morrill Act was to teach agriculture and the mechanical arts, and it established the original land-grant universities (including MSU), while the 1890 Morrill Act specifically targeted Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and the 1994 Equity in Education Land Grant Status Act recognized and provided support to Tribal colleges and universities (Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, n.d.). The 1914 Smith-Lever Act created the Cooperative Extension System to disseminate research and learnings to respond to needs of communities (Danbom, 1986; National Institute of Food and Agriculture, 2025).

In 2016, the then-director of CRFS (and lead author for editions 1–8 of the ABSR and co-author of this publication) was contacted by the associate director of the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) at Mississippi State University (an 1862 land-grant university) to serve on an Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) rapid response team. The purpose of the team was to help determine Extension's role in promoting civil dialogue on race relations in the U.S. The CRFS director was told that the primary reason for selection to the team was the Center's publication and promotion of the ABSR.

A primary action of the rapid response team was the formation of the Coming Together for Racial Understanding (CTRU) initiative, to be coordinated through the SRDC. CTRU is an Extension-initiated dialogue-to-change process developed in partnership with the dialogue-to-action organization Everyday Democracy (Walcott et al., 2020). Its goal is to facilitate new ways of working together across racial differences to foster understanding and to build trust to take collective action to address racism.

CRFS was part of the team leading the planning and design of the first national CTRU workshop in 2018. CRFS also provided some funding[4] for this first workshop through the same grant that supported the ABSR. Teams from 20 states, including from both 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions, participated in this first workshop, with many teams receiving additional follow-up training to hold CTRU workshops with Extension staff and community partners in their own states. Through 2024, 32 states and 46 institutions have had individuals complete the training for state facilitators (G. Langford, personal communication, March 26, 2025).

An evaluation of the CTRU program has shown that it helped increase partnerships between 1862, 1890, and 1994 land grant institutions, changed hiring practices at those institutions, and increased the visibility of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work in Extension programming (Walcott et al., 2020). While such work is under heavy criticism in the current political climate, the ABSR is a resource that helps extensively establish the need for more, better DEI work, rather than a pulling back from DEI goals and principles.[5] CRFS also provided funds[6] to Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) for 10% of one of their state specialist's time to serve on the CTRU planning and design team and have a co-facilitating role in the initial national workshop. The MSUE specialist, in collaboration with other MSUE staff who participated in the 2018 CTRU session, offered two

[3] Some critics of the term and/or system of "land-grants" refer to these institutions as "land-grab universities" (Lee & Ahtone, 2020) given the violent historical practice of stealing land from Indigenous populations in the processes that allowed these lands to be "granted."

[4] Pass-through funds received by CRFS from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

[5] Notably, even in current political conditions, which has seen institution- and sector-wide retreats from DEI per se, the ABSR (to date) has not occasioned comment from our institution.

[6] Pass-through funds received by CRFS from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Michigan training sessions in 2019. In subsequent years, the MSU Extension specialist and a CRFS staff member helped facilitate CTRU trainings in other states.

As the ABSR has become better known in the U.S. food system community, CRFS was provided opportunities to speak about the ABSR and other racial equity-related resources that CRFS developed. These opportunities included conversations with leaders of color of food system organizations in the U.S and Canada, as well as Black and Indigenous farmers and book authors. Frank conversations about privilege and race in the food system with these leaders had a significant influence on CRFS's evolution as an anti-racist organization. As previously described, the ABSR was a key initial output of the 2016 CRFS Racial Equity plan. CRFS has taken other actions aligned with the priorities of its Racial Equity Plan. For two significant examples and a more complete list of other CRFS actions aligned with its Racial Equity Plan, see Appendix B.

Insights Gained and Lessons Learned from 11 Editions of the ABSR

An annotated bibliography can be a useful tool because it helps writers, researchers, educators, and producers of other forms of media connect the central idea of their own communication with the concepts that others have shared (Merkle, 2021). The ABSR has helped create a network of related topics on structural racism and the food system. Though the ABSR is not a comprehensive collection of all aspects of or references to structural racism in the food system, it can serve as a starting point for authors.

Producing an annotated bibliography is a sound strategy for a university-based Center like CRFS to undertake, given the academic requirement for outputs that educate and inform the public, conduct research, and support students, staff, and faculty in their scholarly pursuits. In the current political climate, it can also be a useful tool for grounding the need for anti-racism and actions supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion in existing research. For those in academia, it may facilitate placing commitments to racial equity solidly within the heart of academic freedom—the freedom of an academic to "investigate and discuss the issues in his or her academic field, and to teach and publish findings without interference from administrators, boards of trustees, political figures, donors, or other entities" (American Association of University Professors, n.d., para. 1).

However, the ABSR's impact has gone far beyond academic pursuits. Significantly, the work of researching, curating, editing, promoting, and responding to feedback on the ABSR over 11 editions has been a critical strategy to build more awareness and understanding for the ABSR co-authors (CRFS staff and MSU students) and other CRFS staff regarding structural racism issues. Thus it functions as both an external and internal pedagogical tool. While creating a learning experience for its authors was not intentional at the outset of the ABSR, internal reflection through its development has allowed it to serve as both a compass and a barometer for CRFS as it navigates its own racial equity journey. At the same time, one internal priority going forward is to create further accessible syntheses of the ABSR content (starting with this paper) and to use it to more systematically inform CRFS's programs and strategies.

As with any long-term project, there are always lessons learned and processes that can be improved. For example, CRFS has not yet conducted a thorough evaluation of the ABSR, including a more in-depth examination of who uses the resource and how. This paper will help ground future evaluation of the ABSR to make it more informative for users. We also hope to incorporate a formal feedback process for making improvements to future editions of the ABSR based on user experience. In addition, we thank one of our anonymous reviewers for helping us reflect on the benefits of developing a more structured process for selecting co-authors (students and postdocs), such as creating a base set of questions to ask each potential candidate interested in working on the ABSR. We also foresee adding an agreed-upon learning/on-boarding process about the history of the ABSR and encouraging candidates to reflect upon their own perceptions of structural racism in the food system before and after their work on the project. Documenting these things would be useful to further evaluate (pre- and post-) how the ABSR

also functions as a learning tool for those who work on it.

It is also worth noting that our requests for citations were limited in that they were sent to specific (albeit with national reach) listservs, which controlled the scope of suggestions, and the ABSR co-authors' searches for resources may have been limited by factors such as their search strategies, knowledge domains, and capacities. Additionally, searches by CRFS were conducted using search terms that may have missed some resources or not fully represented the full scope of food system racial equity issues. For example, an article not explicitly naming food sovereignty might have still addressed that issue.

Additionally, though the ABSR has helped guide the work of CRFS, it would have been beneficial for the ABSR authors to conduct an analysis of the content synthesis earlier on in the updating process. For one, it may have helped the authors identify if new citations collected were reflective of cultural shifts or significant events. Moreover, an analysis could have helped identify strategies to improve the ABSR, such as implementing themes sooner. And perhaps most significantly, it could have helped scholars, practitioners, and advocates have access to a concrete and more compact "state of knowledge" review as a companion to the bibliography, especially as the number of resources began to grow past a "digestible" size.

Lastly, in addition to re-thinking our recruitment and selection process for co-authors, the authors will reflect on further internal conversations we might have throughout the production process for new editions of the ABSR. One of our anonymous reviewers asked about how authors' positionality may have affected their own experience and the overall ABSR. Since we have not had a practice of soliciting feedback, we do not have much information on the effects working on the ABSR have had on authors. And we have not done any internal assessments of how author positionality may affect the final product. We propose that our process of broadly soliciting suggestions for the resources and generally including any relevant peer-reviewed and grey literature resources implies that author positionalities may have a limited effect on what goes in the ABSR. However, as the addition of themes to the latest editions shows, there are other ways authors influence the final product, something that bears further consideration for the next editions.

Areas for Further Exploration

Updating the ABSR on a consistent, annual basis since its inception in 2015 has provided a rich data set that, with further analysis, may provide a better understanding of the cultural, social, economic, and political steps needed to create a more equitable U.S. food system. One area for further exploration is a closer examination of the great diversity of journals that are cited in the ABSR. As mentioned earlier, as of the 11th edition there are citations at the intersection of structural racism and the food system from more than 145 unique journals. A deeper analysis of the journals could provide insight into the kinds of topics regarding food system structural racism that are being published by which journals and in what quantity.

Another possibility is starting a new, companion annotated bibliography on structural racism in *global* food systems—not just the U.S. The ABSR authors opted to focus on the U.S., as it is where we work and bring the most lived expertise and relevance. Practical consideration plays a part as well; for example, for our first time creating the resource, narrowing in on the U.S. rather than attempting to characterize structural racism across the globe created a much more tractable task. Nevertheless, in our global food economy, food systems around the world are inextricably interconnected (Hueston & McLeod, 2012). Moreover, global food systems are heavily influenced by power and politics, which often create unjust food systems (Leach et. al., 2020). A professor of agroecology and critical technology states, "I see structural racism as configured through relationships—of surplus value extraction, exploitation, surveillance, control, etc.—that extend transnationally and work through unequal exchange, de-development, and other historical processes of global accumulation" (M. Montenegro, personal communication, July 1, 2025). And a food systems colleague from the United Kingdom cautioned:

> It is also important … that we don't slip into the colonial trick of universalising US based analysis, or any analysis. Instead, we must also align with the political objectives of decolonising knowledge. As such, we need to steadfastly keep our attention on difference and the particular and reveal how race has power in various geographies which are informed by distinct colonial histories and understand more closely how these racialised (and caste) hierarchies show up differently in the food systems outside of the USA. (J. Singh, personal communication, June 19, 2025)

We also note that we have received some questions on the ABSR's role in civil dialogue, considering the current federal policy, political, and funding landscape. In terms of the ABSR's future itself, we have been fortunate that the ABSR has received no direct negative feedback from funders, policymakers, or our institution. On the contrary, significant food systems funders such as the Kellogg Foundation have indicated that they are "in it for the long haul" (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2025; Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders, n.d.-b), and we have not been discouraged from applying to such funders. At the same time, we do seek to increase the ABSR's and subsequent resources' impact in policy and funding landscapes. The groundwork of the ABSR as it exists today was a necessary step for us. In the coming years, we hope to implement and report on further strategies through which the ABSR can provide greater value in the tumultuous political and social climate we live in.

Other suggestions for further exploration of the ABSR include:

- Which thematic areas in the ABSR contain articles/resources that are receiving the most attention (e.g., most citations in other scholarly journals);
- Which academic institutions are generating the highest volume of graduate theses and dissertations related to structural racism in the food system;
- Which journals and publishers have prioritized content focused on structural racism in the food system;
- Why the authors, researchers, and educators focused on food system structural racism chose these journals and publishers;
- Which nonprofit organizations are producing more resources (written and/or video) in this area of work;
- Which cities, states, and/or regions in the U.S. have been the focus of articles, stories, and videos;
- Can Artificial Intelligence (AI) be ethically utilized in the ABSR to enhance learnings about structural racism in the food system? If so, can it generate consistently accurate results?[7]
- And perhaps most compellingly, how can the ABSR contribute more effectively to relevant social change, particularly in the current political landscape?

Further exploration of these and other examples will be part of a forthcoming peer-reviewed paper in preparation. The authors of this publication encourage you—the reader—to explore the latest edition of the ABSR and use it to help inform your understanding and the central ideas of the story you wish to share about structural racism in the U.S. food system.

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[7] We are also exploring if and how AI can be *responsibly* trained on and utilized within the ABSR to answer specific questions about structural racism in the U.S. food system. There is a plethora of research about AI and its potential benefits and risks (Slattery et al., 2026), including environmental harm and inequitable effects on communities. It is likely that the use of AI will continue to grow and become more integrated in our lives. Although the authors of this paper are not advocating for or against AI specifically, conversations about the use of AI in food systems work are burgeoning, and there may be future approaches that decrease potential harm and inequity. For instance, the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems at the University of Wisconsin recently announced a webinar series, "Food Supply Networks and AI," which explores whether and how AI tools may have the potential to create more equitable, sustainable food systems (n.d.)

sent in the U.S. Food System for their contributions. In particular, we extend our thanks to two co-authors—Kimberly Carr and Sydnie Burnstein—who shared quotes about their experience working on the ABSR, and greatly appreciate Sydnie's role in reviewing this publication. We also thank our other food systems colleagues who provided quotes for the publication. The authors would like to express gratitude to the Center for Regional Food Systems Communications team—Communication Strategists Melissa Hill and Emma Beauchamp—for copyediting, feedback, and communications support. Last, but not least, we acknowledge the many authors whose works are included in the ABSR. Their dedication to shedding light on this important topic has been and continues to be of extreme importance to advancing a more just and equitable food system.

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Appendix A

List of Journals with Citations in the ABSR

As of the 11th edition of the ABSR, there are citations at the intersection of structural racism and the food system from more than 145 unique academic journals. Although many of the journals specialize in food, agriculture, and/or closely related fields (e.g., public health), the list also includes journals that focus on topics such as culture, climate, education, law, and geography.

1. Antipode
2. Agriculture and Human Values
3. Geoforum
4. Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development
5. Culture, Agriculture, Food, and Environment
6. Whiteness and Education
7. American Journal of Public Health
8. Cultural Geographies
9. The Professional Geographer
10. Humanity and Society
11. Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems
12. Humanities
13. Journal of Agrarian Change
14. Environment and Society
15. Journal of Rural Studies
16. Food, Culture and Society
17. Journal of Political Ecology
18. Food and Foodways
19. Environmental Justice
20. Gastronomica
21. Graduate Journal of Food Studies
22. American Indian Culture and Research Journal
23. Global Food History
24. Ecological Processes
25. Food Security
26. International Journal of Critical Geographies
27. Climatic Change
28. Human Geography
29. Digest: A Journal of Foodways and Culture
30. Feminist Studies
31. Journal of Urban and Regional Research
32. Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics
33. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health
34. Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities
35. Preventative Medicine
36. Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly
37. Built Environment
38. Pacific Historical Review
39. Health Education Research
40. Cityscape
41. Californian Journal of Health Promotion
42. UC Irvine Law Review
43. Journal of Public Policy and Marketing
44. New Design Ideas
45. PLOS ONE
46. Health and Place
47. Agriculture and Food Security
48. Appetite
49. Anthropology of Work Review
50. Socialism
51. Health Promotion Practice
52. Journal of Critical Dietetics
53. American Journal of Health Promotion
54. Tribal College Journal of American Indians in Higher Education
55. Native American and Indigenous Studies
56. Critical Studies in Education
57. Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene
58. Drake Journal of Agricultural Law
59. Journal of the Agricultural and Applied Economic Association
60. Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics
61. American Journal of Economics and Sociology
62. Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems
63. Civil Liberties Law Review
64. Agricultural Finance Review
65. Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics
66. Journal of Peasant Studies
67. Texas Law Review
68. Professional Agricultural Workers Journal
69. Applied Economics
70. Quarterly Journal of Economics
71. JAMA Network Open
72. UC Davis Law Review
73. Human Organization
74. Journal of Community Health
75. Georgetown Journal on Poverty and Law Review
76. Food Policy
77. Preventing Chronic Disease
78. American Journal of Preventative Medicine
79. Local Environment
80. Health education Research
81. Food Quality and Preference

82. Nutrition Reviews
83. Journal of Best Practices of Health Professions Diversity
84. Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health
85. Sustainability
86. Nutrition Research Review
87. Health Promotion Practice
88. Family and Community Health
89. University of Memphis Law review
90. Epidemiology
91. Politics, Groups, and Identities
92. Southern University Law Review
93. Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment
94. Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine
95. Journal of Multidisciplinary Research
96. American Journal of Community Psychology
97. Multidisciplinary Global Contexts
98. Sociology Compass
99. Nursing Research
100. Fordham Law Review
101. Civil Liberties Law Review
102. Southern Rural Sociology
103. Journal of African American History
104. Journal of African American Studies
105. Western Historical Quarterly
106. Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy
107. University of South Carolina Upstate Student Research
108. Journal of American Ethnic History
109. Journal of Agromedicine
110. Anthropology of Food
111. Ecology of Food and Nutrition
112. International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food
113. Hastings Law Journal
114. Urban Geography
115. Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
116. Society and Natural Resources
117. Journal of Culture and Agriculture
118. Rural Sociology
119. Agroecology of Sustainable Good Systems
120. Graduate Journal of Food Studies
121. Humanity and Society
122. Social Identities
123. Built Environment
124. Urban Agriculture and Regional Food Systems
125. Sociation Today
126. Social Sciences
127. Sociological Spectrum
128. Environmental Practice
129. Sociological Inquiry
130. Annals of the American Association of Geographers
131. Agricultural Systems
132. Environment and Society: Advances in Research
133. Current Developments in Nutrition
134. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space
135. The Scholar
136. Argumenta
137. Environment and Planning F: Philosophy, Theory, Models, Methods, and Practice
138. Harvard Environmental Law Review
139. Health Policy and Planning
140. Journal of Planning and Education Research
141. Nature and Space
142. Social Science and Medicine
143. Annals of Anthropological Practice
144. Journal of American Planning association
145. Applied Geography
146. The Good Society

Appendix B

CRFS Actions Aligned with its 2016 Racial Equity Plan

The ABSR was a key initial output of the 2016 CRFS Racial Equity Plan. However, CRFS has taken other actions aligned with the priorities of the Plan. Below are two examples that provide additional detail, as well as a bulleted/abbreviated list of additional actions.

Racial Equity in the Food Systems Workgroup

Established in 2018, Racial Equity in the Food System (REFS) is a national workgroup whose members are Cooperative Extension professionals and community leaders. REFS' priority goal is to help other food system educators and leaders to connect, learn, and collaborate to build racial equity within the food system and the institutions and organizations in which they work. REFS national webinars on a variety of topics have drawn food system leaders and advocates from hundreds of nonprofits, and educators at universities and colleges from all 50 states, including the 1862, 1890 and 1994 land grant institutions. In 2025, CRFS supported Professor Brandy Phipps at Central State University (an 1890 land-grant) to lead REFS' continuing programming.

Measuring Racial Equity in the Food System: Established and Suggested Metrics

Published in 2019, Measuring Racial Equity in the Food System: Established and Suggested Metrics[8] is a tool that offers an expansive list of metrics that U.S. food system practitioners and food movement organizations can use to hold themselves accountable for progress towards a more equitable food system. The metrics are described, cited, and organized by themes: food access, food and farm business, food chain labor, and food movement.

Other examples of actions related to the 2016 CRFS Racial Equity Plan include:

- Racial equity emphasis in the 2022 Michigan Good Food Charter[9]
- Publication of the report *Delivering More Than Food: Understanding and Operationalizing Racial Equity in Food Hubs*[10] (2020)
- Involvement in the MSU CANR Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee (2018-2020)
- CRFS staff participation in workshops and trainings and webinars as part of annual plans of work (2015 to present; note that given the current climate, this was mandated to be "optional" starting in 2025)
- Inclusivity and equity focus at the 2019 Michigan Farm to Institution Network (MFIN) Gathering
- Annual staff self-evaluation on being an inclusive workplace (2016-present)
- Racial Equity and Food Sovereignty Postdoctoral Fellow (July 2019–June 2020)
- DEI committee lead for the USDA-funded Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) (2020–2022)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) grantee national training on racial equity in the food system (2019)

[8] https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/measuring-racial-equity-in-the-food-system
[9] https://www.canr.msu.edu/michiganfood/index
[10] https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/delivering-more-than-food-understanding-and-operationalizing-racial-equity-in-food-hubs