

Beyond the Dais Podcast: Episode 36 – An Interview with Food to Power

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Scott Anderson: Thank you for tuning into Beyond the Dais, a podcast about the stories taking place in and around El Paso County, Colorado. I'm your host, Scott Anderson, and today I am joined by Slade Custer, the Director of Development for Food to Power. How are you doing today, Slade?

Slade Custer: I'm well, thank you, Scott.

Scott: Good. Thank you for having me. I really appreciate it. And I wanted to quickly add that before we get started here, if listeners are interested in more stories about people doing good in and around El Paso County, or hearing from county leadership about local government priorities and how they operate, you can find additional episodes of this podcast on your podcast platform of choice. But to get into things, I'm wondering Slade if we can start by having you give a bit of background about yourself and how you came to be associated with Food to Power?

Slade: Yeah, no, of course. Yeah. So once again, my name is Slade Custer. I'm Director of Development here at Food to Power. And essentially, I was born in Colorado Springs. Haven't really strayed too far. Left for a couple years for college before transferring back to UCCS, finishing out my degree. But I guess the thing that most people in my personal life know me about is I just really, really like riding my bike.

Scott: This is a pretty good place for that.

Slade: I know, right? It's kind of exciting too, I guess. Not to divert too heavily, but this summer I'm even lucky enough to be able to ride my bike along the Great Divide Mountain Bike Group from Mexico to Canada, so I'm really looking forward to that. But we're not here to talk about that bike.

Scott: Hey man, good luck with that. That's something that I can't ever see myself doing. So, more power to you. That's. Yeah, cool. And so how did you end up here at Food to Power?

Slade: Yeah. So essentially, I have always spent my entire life just volunteering and engaging with the nonprofits in Colorado Springs. And when I transferred back to UCCS to finish out my degree, I kind of made that pretty conscious, this decision you know of, just like I want to get into nonprofit fundraising, and I just started seeking internships. I started volunteering, and I was able to stumble across Food to Power, then at the time Colorado Springs Food Rescue, and like, yeah, the organization, it really kind of spoke

to me. I think one of the things that I appreciated most about Colorado Springs Food Rescue at the time was essentially they never really made any assumptions on what community need was. I really respected that for every single development that the organization did, whether it's a new program or something like the Hillside Hub, which we're sitting in now, how much the organization allocated resources to truly center the community's voice on the development so that they can make sure the programmatic offerings, organizational offerings, reflected what the community actually wanted and needed. And that was kind of like the really big selling point for me. And so, I just kind of volunteered at the organization. Started stalking them online. And then one day there is a job posting that hopped up in my skill set. I applied – lucky enough to get it, and the rest is history.

Scott: Well, there you go. No, that sounds incredible. So, can you give a little bit more background about Food to Power itself and what their main mission is and why they're here in Colorado Springs?

Slade: Yeah. Yeah. So, I guess just to get it out of the way, Food to Power's mission – we're working to cultivate a healthy and equitable food system in Colorado Springs. And so essentially, we are in our ten-year anniversary this year, October of this year, we're going to hit 10 years old. And essentially kind of a little bit of the overview that I always give is the traditional like philanthropic approach historically in this country to food insecurity has been like food pantries or food banks. And while that does really, really good at addressing kind of short-term food insecurity needs, it's not really doing a whole lot to address the reasons for why people are in those free food lines in the first place. So that's kind of the niche that like Food to Power is able to slide into. That's the niche that we're trying to fill. We're trying to address at a systemic and sustainable level why people are standing in those free food lines in the first place. A lot of it comes down just to trying to reduce food waste. You know we were the first organization in Colorado Springs that was going to food distributors and instead of their excess food being thrown away, left to rot in the landfills, create greenhouse gas emissions, we were the first one that really took that excess food and redistributed to communities that could utilize it. Essentially a lot of our work now that we're doing at the Hillside Hub is like, you know, taking the food scraps, composting it to return those nutrients back into the soil so that we can have our urban farm here at the Hillside Hub. Grow healthy, fresh produce here within city boundaries. Be able to give that food out to community members at sliding scale costs for free. And even working in the strategic planning process we're going through right now identifying plots of lands and buildings to reopen grocery stores and food apartheid throughout Colorado Springs. But essentially that's kind of a little bit of our work. There's a lot, lot more into it, but I'm sure we'll do that later.

Scott: No, absolutely. So, it's interesting. You talk about the approach that Food to Power takes. How does the organization go about determining those outcomes? Is it community outreach, research that's done? Like, how do you guys come up with those plans and then effectively execute them?

Slade: So glad you asked that. So actually, back in – cause that was, like I previously mentioned in my intro, Food to Power has never really made assumptions on what to do. We've always wanted to root everything we've done in localized data and when we were hopping into this work, we realized there wasn't that much localized data. So, we actually conducted a whole bunch of research. We partnered with El Paso County Public Health Department in 2017 as well as Colorado College, and we conducted the county's first food systems assessment. Pretty much the goal of that program was to identify which neighborhoods in Colorado Springs face the highest barriers to fresh food access. It used a mix of GIS data and census tract data. You know, looking at the census side of average household size, average household income, average educational attainment, and then we're looking at the GIS data, looking at like average vehicle access to different households, proximity to public services such as public transportation, proximity, how close individuals are to healthy food outlets, things like that. And from all of that like long, extensive two-year resource process of looking at those data, going door to door canvassing, engaging our neighbors, engaging our community, we were able to find four neighborhoods in the city that face the highest barriers to fresh food access. And those neighborhoods are Hillside neighborhood where the hillside hub is, at Knob Hill, Meadows Park, and Pikes Peak Park or Deerfield Hills in Southeast Colorado Springs. And so that's kind of where we really started prioritizing developing programming because we knew on paper, we knew through all that research that those were those neighborhoods. And so that's kind of like where we started at. That's one thing I really love about Food to Power, you know, is we have a lot of really good relationships with the communities that we're in because we work so hard to co-create and provide ownership over our organization with the communities we're in. And so, we were able to leverage those relationships and ask, like, key community titans, key community stakeholders, like, what – what preexisting infrastructure already exists? Where are people comfortable going to? Is it mobile home parks, churches, schools, community centers, nonprofits? Where are people going to cause that's one of the biggest barriers to being able to access service is buried transportation. So, if you're able to host programming in preexisting community assets that people already have the access and ability to go to, that kind of helps reduce that barrier to transportation while enhancing their kind of comfortability of being able to go to that service. But then we kind of took it a step further of essentially asking them like, OK, well hey, who are some really good community members that could maybe volunteer their own or mobilize their own volunteer base to be able to organize like a food distribution for example? Because there's a lot of shame and humility that comes with needing to stand in a free food line. I mean, fresh food in our opinion is a human right and not being able to afford something as basic as fresh food – it can take a lot of shame and humility to kind of come to terms with that and have to hop in a free food line. So, by us hosting these food distributions, hosting a lot of the programs that we have in pre-existing community infrastructure people already go, and then a step further, if the people that they're getting the food from are their community members, their neighbors, the individuals they act with on a day – interact with on a day-to-day basis, that just kind of really enhances that trust. And

so that's kind of like the baseline model for a lot of the work that we do is just trying to match like where program, what programs are hosting in areas that people are comfortable going to, trying to engage and co-create with the community as much as possible, that people are comfortable accessing the services.

Scott: Yeah, very good. And we sort of naturally got to the next question I wanted to ask. You talked about the communities that you serve here in town, but approximately how many people do you serve in those communities?

Slade: Yeah so, last year we were at about 78,000 people. It's very worth mentioning that that is duplicated, that's not unduplicated individuals. But yeah, that's a mix of, you know, the Hillside Hub where we're at now. That's a mix of all those satellite, no-cost grocery programs, that's a mix of all of our member customers for our composting programs, our educational participants. But yeah, we were like just over 78,000 individuals last year, which was our biggest year ever.

Scott: Yeah, that's incredible. And, it's interesting – you mention sort of how Food to Power is different than, you know, like you mentioned, whether it's food pantries and the like. Why is it important for you guys to be viewed as someone in the community that people could go to in their times of need, like, and you're not just another one of the nonprofits in town that are, again, valuable, and here to help, but you're looked at a little bit differently than that. Why is that so important?

Slade: Yeah. And you know, I guess first thing that I'll say is I got to give love and gratitude to the other nonprofits in Colorado Springs that are doing work for the food systems, especially food insecurity. Like without the Care and Shares, without the Marion Houses, things like that, without those really big food access organizations that are providing people the food that they need, meeting those short-term food insecurity needs, if they close down tomorrow, we as an organization would never have the resources to be able to fill that need. So, we could not do our work without all the other nonprofits here in town, and I just really need to start off with that.

Scott: That sounds good.

Slade: But essentially, like I mentioned previously, I threw out the word trust a couple times and I threw out the word co-creation. And literally, that is one of the biggest values of Food to Power, is just trying to co-create the organization and enhance the trust with the community, because essentially, at the end of the day, the organization, the work that we're doing, we can't do this. Like, sustainability goes a lot further than just having dollars to keep the lights on, doors open, staff paid. The sustainability literally is having that community input, having the community trusting this asset and being able to be comfortable and utilize it. Going to their neighbors, doing grassroots marketing for us, telling their neighbors about the service, and so essentially why it's important for us to be viewed as someone you can turn to in the time of need, I'd say that's really big because it ties into kind of like that community and that sense of trust that's built up. Because historically in this neighborhood there have been organizations like, for

example, the Hillside Neighborhood Association. They did incredible work. If anyone drives around Hillside Neighborhood and you see the 1992 All-American City signs around, for example, that was work from the Hillside Neighborhood Association. But unfortunately, that organization shut down. And even to this day, there is a lot of sentiment in the community of, just like, you're doing all this work. That's cool. But what if you just leave? What if you shut down? What if you leave the community and all this work that you did evaporates, right? And so, for the community to come to us in times of need, it's not – it can't be insular. It has to be a larger conversation of building up trust within the communities. It's not something that – trust isn't something that's built in a year. I mean, we spent five years developing the Hillside Hub, engaging in the community, surveying focus groups, neighborhood-led committees, canvassing. Five years of going back and back and back. And essentially, when we first started this work, a lot of people were kind of skeptical, but then we keep going back over and over and enhances that trust. And so, for us as an organization, we literally work for the community. And like, when you're saying coming to us in the time of need, that's kind of like the biggest thing, is just like having that trust so that people trust this resource. They feel comfortable coming to us in times of need. And that's just kind of like why we're here. It's just trying to empower our neighbors so that they can live a happy, healthy life using fresh food as a medium.

Scott: Yeah. And I think it speaks a lot to the organization that, not that you might find this on your website or maybe you can. You can correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems like time investment is a big pillar of the organization, something that you guys really take seriously. I mean, like you said, you were here for years before you actually built the center and before you kind of moved forward with the plan. You were involved in interacting with the community for years. And you know there's no substitute for time, right? You can't, you can't buy time. You can't bottle it. It's just, it is what it is and the time that you spend, I think goes a long way in showing people how much you actually care about a mission and how much you're willing to invest in the community. So no, I think that speaks a lot to you guys as the organization. And so, moving on a little bit, wanted to get more to the ARPA funding side of this. And so, after submitting your grant request to the county, Food to Power was awarded \$250,000 of funding. Can you talk to us a little bit about what that money has gone to fund?

Slade: Yeah, so it's kind of like the least glamorous thing that it is technically funding, but it's one of the most important aspects of all nonprofits, and it's essentially staff wages. That is a huge conversation. Huge dysfunction in the nonprofit sector is foundations, individuals who have grant dollars, they always want to fund the newest and the most exciting and innovative thing, and oftentimes that can force nonprofits to have to deal with like, mission creep. You know, dollars run up. They may have a really solid model that's working really, really, really well, but it's not the new glamorous thing. And no one wants to keep funding the same old, same old. And so, nonprofits sometimes like drift in their mission because they have to create new programs. And so that's kind of like one of the biggest things that I have gratitude, love and appreciation to

this funding is recognizing that like, for example, we have about a million-and-a-half-dollar budget, and about one million of that is strictly staff wages. Our staff wages are our programs. For example, the ARPA funds, it's pretty much covering staff wages for our food access department. We have a team of four individuals. Three of them are full time. One of them is part time, and they are the mobilizing agents that coordinate the volunteers. They're going to the grocery stores; they're picking up that excess food. They're delivering that food to partner organizations so that it can be redistributed, often within an hour or two. It's literally in the hands of people going into their homes. But yeah, just once again, I need to reiterate how, like our programs, they literally are run by staff and our like programmatic expenses, materials, supplies, things like that are very, very low. And like for example, I know the listeners, they aren't here in person, but like right out there are like food access space. We don't have a lot of inventory because we're able to pick up that food and redistribute it often within, yeah, literally hours of it being picked up. And so, for ARPA funds to be able to fund our staff wages so that we can mobilize those volunteers, mobilize those resources, recover food, reduce food waste, be able to get food back into the hands of people and reduce food from going into the landfills rotting, creating greenhouse gas emissions. I mean, these ARPA funds are creating a huge, huge impact, not only on affecting our local environment by reducing the amount of food waste, but also just being able to literally reduce food insecurity through the staff that this grant is single-handedly funding, being able to decrease food insecurity by getting food into people's homes. It's just a huge, huge impact and we're so grateful.

Scott: And so, I'm gonna go a little off the beaten path here. I don't normally ask this, but you bringing it up has me curious because I've heard this at a couple of other places. So, correct me if I'm wrong, you are the one who's in charge of writing proposals for those grants. Is that correct?

Slade: Yes.

Scott: So, I mean it's part of your job to make sure you're able to obtain that funding so you can use it for staff wages, right? So, what do you think that does internally for your organization when they know that someone who's in your position is doing everything they can to maintain staff and to give, to give back to the staff in the way that you would like to because of the valuable work that they do? What do you think that does internally for an organization?

Slade: Yeah, I mean, internally the organization, I mean for one, it's just, I'd say the biggest metric I would look at honestly is staff turnover. There's a lot of things that influence turnover and turnover is extremely costly.

Scott: Yeah.

Slade: Having hired another person in my department this year and looking how many resources I'm pumping to training them, yeah, turnover takes a lot of resources. And that's one thing that I truly love about Food to Power is we hardly have any staff

turnover. I mean, our founding executive director left a few years back, but that was because he kind of had this realization that his personality style was fit for a startup type organization. As we were entering the mature phase of our operations, he felt that his personality wasn't right to lead it. There have literally only been like on one hand in the history of the organization, the individuals that in the last five years who have left. We have a lot of staff who have been here for years and years and years, five to six years plus. I've only been here for three, hoping to be here for a long time because I truly love this organization. And I think that just kind of like answering your questions, particularly of just like looking at how much like the development department has to fight and how much we're talking to foundations, pushing philanthropic norms, advocating for being able to get those resources, because paying staff is only one part of it. But investing in staff is a whole other conversation. Looking at the organization's foundation, just being like hey, we need money for professional development, we need to influence, we need to develop an equitable professional development policy so that staff have a lot of money to get professional development. Our professional development isn't even only catered to our specific jobs. Even if individuals are wanting to get a certification for, so like, a passion that they're passionate about. They can apply to our internal professional development policy and be able to get funding for that. And essentially all of that is just kind of tying into not only like how important unrestricted wages are or unrestricted gen-ops funding is for wages. But it's just a larger conversation of just trying to make sure that your employees' needs are met so that you can create a culture that fosters and grows its employees instead of just expecting them to be a wheel in the cog that's trying to, for example, just pump food out right now.

Scott: I mean, I think it's extremely valuable to highlight that an organization, how an organization treats its people because I think it's a good reflection then on how they treat other people, right? If you don't treat your own employees well, how can you be expected to treat people outside the organization well, right? And so, if you are able to take care of your employees in certain ways and give them different opportunities, I think it says a lot for the organization. So that's one of the reasons why I wanted you to highlight that because I do think it's important for people who listen to understand that these nonprofit organizations that I'm speaking with, they really do value their employees. It's not just grind them until they're completely done and burnt out and then you move on to the next one. So, thank you for sharing that. I really appreciate that.

Slade: Yeah.

Scott: I wanted to go back a little bit to cooperation with different organizations within the community. Now I certainly don't have to tell you that the nonprofit world, I think, thrives when they cooperate with other nonprofits in a community. How has that idea benefited the programs that you guys are working on?

Slade: Yeah, I guess where I'll kind of start off is, once again, we opened the Hillside Hub, the City's first neighborhood food center. We opened this June 12th of last year, and it officially kind of transferred us and we evolved into our mature stage of operations

categorized by being a place-based organization. So, we have a physical place, a physical home hub, so to speak, where we're kind of like facilitating all of our operations out of, but for the previous eight years prior to that we were a network-based organization, which pretty much means that we didn't have a physical home to operate out of. We had to rely on partner organizations' infrastructure essentially to host programming. So literally like partnerships collaborating with other nonprofits is rooted very, very deeply into our history. And even now that we have the Hillside Hub, those partnerships are only amplified because essentially the kind of, like, the grant jargon language that we use is like the hub and spoke model. You know, I mean it helps that, like, this is called the Hillside Hub, but essentially thinking of like a bicycle wheel, going back to my passions, you have a bicycle wheel and you know you have the hub in the middle and then you have all those individual spokes that go out. And so essentially the hillside hub is kind of like that hub in the center. And then we're able to, like, mobilize all of our resources and we're able to set, have those spokes that go out to all those different 60-plus partners, and we're able to kind of increase our impact in our partnerships with those nonprofits. But I mean, yeah, like you said, partnerships are huge for nonprofits because there's – there are only so many resources in any given environment. And that is especially true for nonprofits. Whether you're looking at dollars by grants that you're competing, or individual donors, or even in the Colorado Springs food landscape, for example, there are so many, like, food distribution outlets where individuals like nonprofits can go to recover food, to redistribute it. And so, partnerships essentially are absolutely huge. And for organizations like Food to Power and Care and Share where we have the resources, we have those relationships built with, like, those food distributors. To recover that excess food, we, it is like our responsibility, I feel, to essentially build partnerships with other nonprofits that don't have the ability to build those relationships and get that food. It is our responsibility to kind of mobilize the resources so that we can empower and equip other nonprofits because, essentially, like, Hillside Hub, I've talked about Food to Power and how much we've worked to build up trust with the communities we're in. But there are other nonprofits who have spent so many resources creating trust with the individuals and their constituent base and their neighbors and the participants they're serving. And so, as much trust as we have tried to build in our community, we recognize how far our trust goes. We only have so many resources to cultivate and grow relationships. And so, if we're able to, for example, get fresh food from like Trader Joe's or a Whole Foods, and we're able to take that to another partner nonprofit like Solid Rock CDC in Southeast College Springs. Incredible organization. They have worked tirelessly to build a really good relationship with a lot of individuals in Southeast. And so, we're essentially able to tap into their resources, tap into the trust that they've built and empower them, give them the food that they need so they can amplify their mission, amplify their impact with the resources that were able to help provide them.

Scott: Wonderful. And next, I was wondering if there was a personal story that you'd be able to share from someone who has benefited from the services that you guys provide.

Slade: So many. Man, I gotta say, let's see. The no-cost grocery program here at the Hillside Hub. It's cool. Essentially one of the biggest valleys of Food to Power's, we're just trying to use the Hillside Hub as a conduit for creating community. And so, one of my favorite things is being able to like on Tuesdays and Saturdays when we have our no-cost grocery programs, you go out and it's interesting. Tuesdays, they start at 2:00 PM and Saturdays they start at noon. And I kid you not, on Tuesdays there will be individuals who start sitting in the chairs and start getting in the queue for the line literally at like 10:30 or 11:00. And that's not just because of, like, scarcity of resources or whatever. They've literally talked to us of like how much they enjoy being able to connect with other individuals in their community. It's almost turned into, like, an informal gathering place where individuals are coming and building community and just talking and conglomerating and just, like, sharing resources, building up that sense of community, building trust, building relationships. And it is, like, really, really funny because for example, one time, I won't name drop the individual, but there is one individual where they just kind of developed a little bit of like a paternal instinct for our staff. They're like, how are you all doing? And for example, Natalia Avila, our food access manager, and myself, admittedly we both kind of struggle to make sure to eat enough food because we're so busy working. And so, this individual essentially went up to Natalia and just almost threw a fit. They're like, what? You're not eating food. You're not doing this and this. Like, well, I'm going to start doing this and like, well, what types of food do you like? And so, me and Natalia were like, well, we both really like tamales. And so, this individual literally was able to go through the no-cost grocery program when she was like, well, you know, I don't normally take this. I'm going to take a little bit of extra for this. I'm sorry, I'm going to take a little bit of extra food and I'm going to go home and I'm going to make tamales. And sure enough, the next program, she came back, and she brought whole trays of tamales. And now it's pretty much like almost every single grocery program she's bringing fresh, freshly cooked, like, Latino food, where she's just able to come in and like feed some of our staff. And then it was really cool seeing the sustainability of that too, because it turns out those dishes were really, really good. And that's another component of what we have here at the Hillside Hub is we have educational workshops to try to promote the generational transfer of knowledge. And so that individual, for example, we were able to praise them enough for the tamales that they were making. So, and we encouraged them to host an educational workshop so they had a tamale-making workshop and yeah. Pretty much like a whole bunch of individuals in the community were able to purchase tickets on a sliding scale, pay what they wanted to be able to attend, they learned how to make tamales. And so, it's just kind of funny how that whole kind of interaction just started from like, no-cost grocery program participants coming here, interacting with our staff, building community with their neighbors, hearing of, like, our needs a little. Ridiculous thing, like how me and Natalia struggle to find time to eat and then she just starts making us food. It was so good that she was able to, like, host an educational workshop, teach that skill to other members in the community and yeah, who knows how many households out there are making tamales now?

Scott: Yeah, no, that's incredible. Thank you for sharing that. I was wondering, are there any other programs that Food to Power offers that you feel would be important for listeners to know about? You mentioned there's the Hillside Hub here and there's no-cost groceries. But are there any other programs that you guys do?

Slade: So essentially, we host a variety of programming, and we have three integrated pillars of programming that work to encompass the entire food cycle. So, our first integrated pillar of programming is food access. That's like our no-cost grocery programs in our food distributions. We also have, like, food delivery for like, homebound seniors in our community. We also partner with a vet across the street from Marion House where we get pre-prepared meals and pet food, and that vet is able to, like, vaccinate and give all the animals all their treatment for houseless individuals and they were able to give them food. Our second integrated pillar is food production and essentially Colorado Springs – we opened Colorado Springs' first, like, urban farm. So here at the Hillside Hub we have like a really big urban farm. I mean not really big by any standards, big for us, but it's essentially like, yeah, we were able to engage the community for eight months and find out two things. Not only like what the community wants to eat, but also what they spend money on, and we were able to develop a crop plan that is culture – that provides culturally relevant food for individuals in the community. And also within food production to be able to grow food you need healthy and nutritious soil, so we have that. We opened in 2018 the city's first residential compost service. So essentially if you live kind of like in Hillside neighborhood downtown, you qualify for like curbside compost pickups. But if you live outside those areas, we have six different drop-off stations all throughout the city. And so once again, sliding scale, you pick what you want to pay and then you can essentially drop off your food scraps with us, we compost them and then you get free compost twice a year and we use the extra compost in our farm to generate soil. And then our last integrated pillar of programming is food education and advocacy. So essentially a lot of this is just tying into paid opportunities for youth. We have like the fly-paid internship where if you're a high school-aged youth in the city, you can get paid throughout the summer months, \$17.50 an hour, just to learn about the food system. You're working on like projects, developing 21st century soft employable skills, shadowing each department, helping the organization out with its operations. We also have PARTY, which is Participatory Action Research Team for Youth, which is essentially a paid research opportunity for youth where they're helping us get kind of that quantitative data around what barriers to fresh food access actually look like. That department also has after school programming at Hillside Community Center for Education, or for elementary aged-youth in the spring and fall. And then we recently just kicked off the advocacy component of that department as well, where essentially we can do as much work as we want here at the Hillside Hub, but at the end of the day there are policies that are being created at the county, state, national level that are – have a huge impact on our local food system. So, for example, we kicked off our first campaign last year, the Healthy School Meals for All campaign, which is essentially looking to get healthy school meals, literally for all school-age children. We know that there are a lot of, there's a lot of stigma around free

and reduced lunch. There's a lot of bowling that goes into that. Especially when you look at the demographics of individuals who traditionally qualify for free and reduced lunch. And yeah, essentially, we started lobbying for that. I think it was like April of last year and we had, we got like over 100 people to register to vote. We had knocked on over like 700 doors and at the end of the day, healthy school meals for all in El Paso County passed by 755 votes. So, like the night that that passed our team was just jubilant because, like, holy smokes. We might have had like, a clear, like, tangible impact on that. But that's just a really cool policy measure too, because essentially all that food for healthy school meals for all is all being sourced from local Colorado farms. So instead of the money in our economy being sent out to mega corporations all throughout the US, that money is staying here locally in Colorado and circulating in our local economy. So essentially, those are kind of like our three integrated pillars of programming and they just work to impact the whole food cycle, starting from healthy, nutritious soil to the seed you're putting in it, to the food that grows from that seed, harvesting it, helping people access it, but then also taking those food scraps and returning that nutrients back to the soil through composting.

Scott: Very good. And for those who may be seeking services, how can they go about obtaining those services from Food to Power?

Slade: Yeah, I mean, the biggest thing is definitely the website. For anyone listening www.foodtopowerco.org, spelled out f-o-o-d-t-o-p-o-w-e-r-c-o-dot-o-r-g. And that will kind of be like our landing page for a lot of stuff. We have kind of three tabs at the top where it's just kind of, like, get involved. Do you want to eat? Do you want to learn? Do you want to farm? Do you want to grow? Things like that. And so, you're able to essentially, it's like, yeah, if you need access to food, you can click on the Eat tab and you can see where all of our different 14 no-cost grocery programs throughout the whole city are. If you want to volunteer for example, and you just want to kind of pay it forward a little bit and you want to maybe get your hands dirty and hop into the soil, you can click on like the Get Involved volunteer and we have like monthly onboarding sessions if you want to get involved with us that way. But I would just say that's kind of like the biggest landing page. We also have, like, a newsletter that pumps out information on like no-cost grocery program closures if for any reason a grocery program has to close for like one Saturday and we can't run it or if there's like a volunteer training opportunity coming up or if we're even launching a new program. But I'd say most of that can be found through the website.

Scott: Very good. And I feel like we've covered a lot of ground here today. But I wanted to ask, is there anything else that you want to share that maybe we haven't talked about yet or just something you want to reiterate that you feel would be important for people to really drive a point home?

Slade: Yeah, I think the biggest thing, and this isn't even me saying this, this is what I've heard so many other people say, is that you can't really, truly grasp the work that we're doing until you come here in person to the Hillside Hub. Once you're able to, I

mean, see the farm, once you're able to see the interior of the building, all the cool colors, the cool structure. Once you're able to see the view, I mean, holy smokes, we have one of the most unparalleled, like 270-degree panoramic, unobstructed views of the mountains.

Scott: No, that's true. I'm looking at it right now. It's very, very nice.

Slade: Yeah, you can get a perfect overview of downtown, Garden of the Gods, Mount Hermon, all of it. It's just incredible. And I'd say that would be the biggest thing is as much as, like, if like, maybe you're listening to this podcast and you, I don't know felt inspired by anything I said, or maybe if you just want to learn more, I would just recommend you all to reach out. Like I'll say my e-mail at the end of this little spiel. But at the end of the day, like I said, I've heard it from so many people external to the organization. If you can't truly grasp, like, the impact that we're making here, you can't truly grasp the totality of our work unless you're able to kind of see the Hillside Hub in person. And so, for everyone real quick I'm just going to spell out my e-mail in case you would want to reach out and get a tour because that's my favorite part of my job is just going on to the Hillside Hub, and that's just spelled out s-l-a-d-e-at-f-o-o-d-t-o-p-o-w-e-r-c-o-dot-o-r-g. So, slade@foodtopowerco.org.

Scott: Very good. Well, thank you, Slade. I appreciate you taking the time today and for all the work that you do here at Food to Power. So, thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

Slade: Yeah. Thank you, Scott.

Scott: If you're interested in listening to additional episodes of Beyond the Dais, be sure to look for us on Spotify, Podbean, or wherever you get your podcasts. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time.