



Collaborative Gatherings

By David B. Goldstein, Co-Director

A hallmark of *Before 'Farm to Table'*'s approach to collaboration is the gathering together of interested people to engage the most pressing questions of foodways both in early modernity and in society today. Among the numerous collaborations and conversations nourished by our project, we planned three large collaborative gatherings, one each in the project's first, second, and third phases. Each gathering served a different function. The first brought together existing knowledge about how to build a multi-year collaborative project in food studies; the second developed a model for teaching historical food studies to graduate students from across the disciplines; and the third provided a conduit to communicate our own research and that of allied scholars to a larger public. Together these three gatherings map a present and future network of food scholarship, exploration, and activism within and beyond early modern Britain .

We smilingly called our first collaborative gathering “[The Folger Diet](#)” after the great deliberative assemblies of the Holy Roman Empire, such as the infamous Diet of Worms where Martin Luther was condemned. We intended no diet of worms, literal or figurative, but instead a friendly convocation of researchers and institutions whose experience of multi-year projects in historical food studies might inform our own. Over the course of a weekend involving conversation both about and at the table, a group of ten allied scholars generously helped us identify the challenges and opportunities involved in shaping such initiatives.

Having drawn knowledge and sustenance from the larger scholarly community, we focused our attention on developing a model for teaching the next generation of thinkers how to do this collaborative work. For our next collaborative gathering, “[Eating Through the Archives: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Early Modern Foodways](#),” we invited two dozen graduate students, working in ten different disciplines and multiple periods, from across Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Asia, to join us at the Folger for an intensive weekend of training in food studies led by the entire *Before 'Farm to Table'* team. The workshop culminated with a panel discussion involving DC community activist [Ambrose Lane Jr.](#), food policy advocate [Laura MacCleery](#), and associated project scholar [Michael W. Twitty](#), that joined the research power of scholarship with the essential food policy issues facing local and global communities today.

“[Food and the Book: 1300-1800](#),” the last collaborative gathering to take place during the grant period, pivoted again, this time toward the wider academic community and the general public. Co-organized with the Newberry Library and presented digitally due to the pressures of COVID-19, this scholarly conference was anchored by two public programs. The first, “[Cooking by the Book: A Conversation with Chefs and Authors](#),” explored the relevance of early cookbooks to the immediate work of cooking and feeding, as well as to shaping a national

conversation about the hidden and undervalued labour of women and people of color. The second, “[Indigenous Foodways Past and Present](#),” held on Indigenous People’s Day, addressed the ways in which Indigenous foodways in North America not only survive but continue to develop in novel ways. The [conference](#) as a whole, which featured scholars associated with *Before ‘Farm to Table,’* researchers involved in other relevant projects, and a panel of cutting-edge work by graduate students, demonstrated the current state of our knowledge about food in and through the book, while planting the seeds of new approaches, preparing us for ever more challenging and meaningful explorations.