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James Beard Recognizes Niaz Dorry and the Fight Against Corporate Takeover of Sea and Land Food Systems

With her James Beard award, she invites chefs to challenge factory farms at sea and on land.

CHICAGO, IL — When Niaz Dorry became coordinating director of the [North American Marine Alliance](#) (NAMA) in 2008, one of the first things she did was have the organization join the [National Family Farm Coalition](#) (NFFC) as its first non-farming member. Though fishing and farming communities are joined in the same food systems, they've often been treated separately in advocacy and policy. Dorry recognized that, and made it her mission to collaborate with others willing to [bridge the gap](#) between sea and land food systems, particularly emphasizing the importance of family-scale, values-based, and Indigenous fishing and farming communities.

In 2018, Dorry became NFFC's executive director, bringing the two organizations together under a shared leadership model. Both are advocating for policies that can transform food systems away from big-business control to locally-led operations steeped in values like fair prices, racial justice, and the right to live in vibrant and healthy communities.

This work is now being recognized with a 2024 James Beard Foundation Leadership Award in the category of Policy Advocacy. Dorry received the prize on June 9 at a ceremony in Chicago. "Nothing I do is as an individual, so the honor goes to our collective movement of fishing and farming families, who are rooted in food sovereignty and community stewardship of waters and lands. With this award, we call on the James Beard family to join our struggles against the corporate capture of our food systems and the expansion of factory farms on land and at sea," she said.

Dorry, 60, was a community organizer working on environmental justice issues with Greenpeace when she was approached with the idea of organizing in fishing communities. She was hooked once she understood that the same root issues were undermining the rights of communities in East Liverpool, Ohio — where she worked alongside local residents to fight the world's largest toxic waste facility — and Gloucester, Massachusetts, which she's called home for the past thirty years while fighting against factory fishing operations. "It was clear to me that these were both fights against multinational corporations willing to decimate entire communities and ecosystems in pursuit of global movement of capital and profit," Dorry said.

Today, both NFFC and NAMA's campaigns to take back our food systems are going strong. NFFC is championing the demands of family-scale farmers on Capitol Hill, calling for fair policies in the [upcoming Farm Bill](#) that will secure transparent [farm credit opportunities](#), prevent the [corporate capture of farmland](#), and support [fair prices for dairy farmers](#). NAMA has active campaigns to combat the commodification of fishing rights through [catch share policies](#), the expansion of [offshore fish farming](#), and the development of [genetically engineered salmon](#), all while uplifting [values-based](#) seafood systems.

Dorry's position at the helm of both organizations has allowed her to identify common threats and opportunities between farming and fishing communities. An example that stands out to her is the top-down push by agribusiness companies such as Cargill and JBS Foods for more industrial aquaculture production.

"We see the same players moving from industrial agriculture and confining animals in captivity on land to industrial aquaculture caging fish at sea. And they are using the same playbook: privatizing land and water, capturing government interests, undermining community rights, and misleading with greenwashed (or bluewashed) narratives," Dorry said.

"The Green Revolution decimated rural farming communities and failed to feed the hungry. And yet governments and businesses are now calling for a Blue Revolution, and 'blue economies' based on the extraction of ocean resources and decline of rural fishing communities," she said.

At the same time, there are lessons to be shared across land and sea, Dorry said. Aquaculture practitioners might learn, for instance, from agroecology and regenerative agriculture movements embodied by NFFC's membership. In 2024, NAMA released an [Aquaculture Values Report](#) that aimed to lay a foundation for sustainable and equitable aquaculture development.

As Dorry sees it, chefs in the James Beard community have a critical role to play. "We know running a food operation is no easy task. Many chefs struggle to maintain their businesses, just as farmers and fishermen struggle to make ends meet. By working together we can lift up the community-based operations — whether the farm down the road, the boat up the coast, or the restaurant in our neighborhoods — and collectively resist the corporate playbook, strengthen relationships between local food providers, and educate eaters through healthy and delicious food," she said.

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Photos for media use are available [here](#).

Additional resources and info sheets are available [here](#).

More about Niaz Dorry: Dorry has been a community organizer for over 30 years working for environmental, social, and economic justice causes. Before becoming NAMA's coordinating director in 2008 and NFFC's executive director in 2018, she was a community organizer with Greenpeace and interim COO with the Healthy Building Network. With her guidance, NAMA has grown from a small network focused on New England's fisheries and ecosystems to one representing more than 500,000 fishing families across Turtle Island and millions more worldwide, who lead NAMA's work through decentralized organizing. The National Family Farm Coalition represents 30 member organizations and more than 50,000 farmers and ranchers in rural communities across the United States.

More about the James Beard Leadership Awards: The Leadership Awards program recognizes achievement by individuals and/or organizations who are actively working to set standards that create more equitable, just, sustainable, and economically viable food systems for producers, workers, and consumers alike. Policy Advocacy is one of four new categories for the Beard Leadership Awards, and is awarded to policymakers or advocates who are advancing federal legislation and/or other regulations prioritizing a more sustainable and equitable food system. [Click here to read more](#).