Faculty Spotlight: Karima Samadi

This month's DEI Faculty and Staff Spotlight features Karima Samadi who is a Food and Agriculture Knowledge Integration Specialist at CFAES' Knowledge exchange where she delivers the broader impacts of research through integration and translation. Karima was previously a Research Coordinator for the research projects: HEAL MAPPS (Healthy Eating, Active Living – Mapping Attributes using Photographic Participatory Surveys), Voices for Food, and PROSPER (Promoting School-community-university Partnerships to Enhance Resilience)

**Why is engaging in diversity, equity, and inclusion, important to your work?**
I am a child of immigrants. Growing up, I was told I had to work three times harder than everyone else because I am: an immigrant, a woman, and I have brown skin. Concurrently, I was taught about my cultural heritage and how I came from a long line of farmers and merchants from India and Afghanistan. From an early age I learned that my diversity was both a gate of opportunity AND a barrier to entry.

Having lived in many different places in the US: the southwest, Appalachia, and now the Midwest – I practiced navigating that contrast and learned that we all generally value the same things within the scope of our unique human experiences. Although I still encountered racism and discrimination, I learned some people are ignorant to things that they have not been taught or exposed to; and sometimes when left unchecked, that ignorance turns into hate and bigotry.

Engaging in DEI work keep us all in “check” – by reminding us step to outside our bubbles and broaden our perspectives. Incorporating DEI into our work helps to check those “blind spots”

**How do you contribute to DEI work within CFAES and or the greater university or community?**
I was first exposed to DEI work eight years ago through the Tri-State Diversity Conference, where I met many OSU Extension colleagues that continue their DEI work through outreach and engagement. Then through a research collaboration OSU Extension and the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, I engaged in community-based participatory research around food insecurity. I continue that food justice work through the Franklin County Local Food Council and stay connected to colleagues through the [CFAES DEI Book Club](#).

**How did your career path lead to this type of advocacy work?**
My undergraduate degree is in Nutrition (Dietetics), but I always had more of an interest in the community than the clinical path. A five-year journey through a “community” career path provided experiences in childhood obesity prevention, food and agriculture education, and
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nutrition education. During my time as an Extension professional, I earned my Master’s in Public Health degree from OSU. Public Health is centered on health equity and food insecurity is a social determinant of health, so therein lies the convergence between public health, health equity, and the food system. It is in this intersection that I found a place for food security work in CFAES. Now through my integration role at the Knowledge Exchange, I look forward to connecting and amplifying the research in the food system and beyond.

What do you see as strengths within CFAES related to DEI?
There is growing participation in DEI work in our college community. To maintain strength in DEI, we must continue to support Inclusive Excellence through hiring and reinforce the Principles of Community to maintain a culture of equity and inclusion. Investing in DEI efforts (with supporting staff and resources) sends the message that we value our people, which builds trust in the college among faculty, staff, and students of color. When our country experienced a racial awakening last year after the murder of George Floyd, the statements of solidarity released by our college leadership activated a DEI Taskforce (originating in OSU Extension) that provided recommendations to prioritize the work of the newly formed CFAES DEI Action Council. By continuing to be proactive rather than reactive, we become a model for DEI at the university.

In what areas would you like to see growth within our college related to DEI?
There is so much diversity to celebrate in our college – we must continue to show support for BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of color) and LGBTQ+ faculty, staff, and students. There are also opportunities to expand our DEI efforts through cross-collaboration and alignment with other initiatives across the university. Lastly, with COVID-19 we saw a collapse in our food system that severely impacted our most marginalized individuals by the pandemic. Food security and food access continue to be an issue for our BIPOC and Hispanic/Latinx households. There is an opportunity to expand our research around food chain workers, migrant farm workers – who are mostly minority and underrepresented in our research. Our strength is in our people, who have invested in DEI work and blaze the trail for creating meaningful programs and community-university partnerships.

What advice do you have for other faculty or staff who are interested in getting involved in DEI work?
Every little bit counts! Showing up for diversity, equity, and inclusion is not only sitting on a taskforce or council. To be a DEI Advocate, you can simply: sign up for newsletters, register for webinars, or simply commit to the Principles of Community.

Engaging in DEI work is integral to our mission to sustain life at CFAES, and fulfils our Land-Grant mission to teach, conduct research, and engage communities.

The meaning of life is to find your gift, the purpose of life is to give it away – Pablo Picasso