

FOOD JUSTICE ISSUE BRIEF

Food Justice builds an equitable food system by:

- ▣ Recognizing structural relations of power as necessary to confront race, class and gender privilege;ⁱ
- ▣ Acknowledging the historical and present day traumas, and remembering that the history and expression of trauma varies locally, and is fueled by the power of global hierarchies of privilege;ⁱⁱ
- ▣ Creating equitable ways to access, manage and control land and other resources;ⁱⁱⁱ
- ▣ Forging new exchange mechanisms that build communal reliance through cooperation, trust, and sharing;^{iv}
- ▣ Compensating fairly and protecting and supporting the value of all labor;^v
- ▣ Institutionalizing equity in democratic participatory processes at every institutional level;
- ▣ Enacting policies that repair past injustices that are still felt today;
- ▣ Applying agro-ecological land use practices that benefit other-than-human life;
- ▣ Building on diverse knowledge systems to grow food, make change and sustain societies; and
- ▣ Analyzing and evaluating policies and programs for their capacity to bring about systemic change.

Food justice acknowledges and addresses structural violence

Food justice begins by recognizing a past that is still felt. The present agri-food system would not exist but for land theft and broken treaties, genocide, forced relocation and denial of traditional and negotiated access rights. It would not exist but for slavery, dispossession, patriarchy and backbreaking, low paid labor, and low remuneration for farmers. A food movement based on the vision of a rosy past agri-food system ignores this history. **The relations of power that created this past continue to be felt today.**

In the present, food justice acknowledges, analyzes, and addresses relations of power that make life easier for some and more difficult for others – people of color, women, indigenous people, and the impoverished everywhere. A gender analysis shows that food work is done by women, whether in the home or outside it, pay for food work is low, and women are vulnerable to gendered violence. A long, patient, and largely invisible war on the poor is being waged; the poor are more likely to be women, nonwhite, elderly, and disabled. In the U.S. food system, health care disparities, lack of benefits, low wages, less wealth, hunger, and food insecurity disproportionately affect people of color. Around the world, the consequences of unfair trade policies, structural adjustment, debt, exploitative contracts, dumping, land grabs, and poisoned earth result in inequities that food justice seeks to change. **The name of this past and present is structural violence.**

A global sense of place informs food justice strategy and action

Food justice means acting collectively for significant change at multiple geographic scales. It finds community in networks of allies with common ideals and practices. Organizing in a neighborhood or a city is important because it builds relationships. But food justice cannot limit its vision to ‘the local,’ a scale sometimes favored by the food movement. Every ‘local’ exists because of internal relationships and relationships to other places, relationships that are typically uneven. Similarly, a harmonious community is an aspiration; all communities can benefit from addressing social hierarchies and conflicts. If this fact goes unrecognized, the imagined community falls apart due to conflict and exploitation. As a result, governance that brings fairness and equality of power are necessary. While we need community control of food systems, we also need to work toward accountability at the state, national and global scales.

Perspectives from the social sciences and humanities can aid food justice

A ‘feed the world’ narrative is popular in many domains of the public, policymaking, and the university. This view suggests that global society should depend almost solely on technological expertise to confront the problem of a

growing population and a global environment degraded by agriculture. A related and equally popular perspective attributes food insecurity and obesity to a lack of knowledge about nutrition and unhealthy behavior.^{vi} Here, the solution is to provide information and promote behavior modification. Critical scholarship from the social sciences and humanities reveals the social structures at the foundation of food insecurity. Scholarship in the social sciences and humanities has documented the:

- ▣ Relations of power that determine who has land, resources and food and who does not;^{vii}
- ▣ Role of systemic racism, gender inequality and class structure in what people eat;
- ▣ Reasons the dominant approach has, to date, failed to ‘feed the world’;
- ▣ Importance of listening to indigenous, resource-user, and others’ forms of knowledge;
- ▣ Dangers of assuming that some positions are objective and non-ideological while others are not; and
- ▣ Stories we tell about ourselves, and with an understanding of these stories, helps us to avoid simplistic strategies.^{viii}

Why is food justice useful?

Equitable societies are more ecologically sustainable, socially resilient, safe, healthy, efficient, representative, productive and happy. In order to create a more fair society, inequities have to be recognized as everyone’s problem. With justice at the forefront, this idea has the potential to create coalitions across difference.

Food justice is indispensable to a functioning democracy and necessary to food security. It

- ▣ Explicitly seeks to undermine rather than reproduce existing power structures;
- ▣ Creates space for more voices rather than perpetuating practices that exclude many;
- ▣ Enables public empowerment through participatory, collaborative work;
- ▣ Seeks transformative change rather than temporary solutions to structural problems;
- ▣ Shifts the food movement closer to its stated ideals and aims; and
- ▣ Challenges the dominant ‘feed the world’ paradigm.

Practicing food justice in Minnesota

Pursue equity, create commons, scale up and collaborate democratically

In Minnesota, there are many available points of intervention for practicing food justice. Some are already underway. Alliances have formed between agricultural, indigenous, and climate campaigns (IATP, Idle no More, 350.org) and there are food movement members active in Growing Food and Justice for All. As new initiatives take shape and old projects continue, the following are recommendations for putting food justice into practice:

- ▣ Make reparations to indigenous nations to heal trauma, allow repossession of resources, and enable the development of capacity (truth and reconciliation for restorative justice);
- ▣ Enable equitable access to land;
- ▣ Look outside the food box at issues like gentrification;
- ▣ Ask constituents to vote with your vote;
- ▣ Require the state to enforce equity and protect people from exploitation;
- ▣ Niche projects and market action are sometimes helpful but they are not enough;
- ▣ Ask who makes the decisions and benefits from those decisions;
- ▣ Confront and speak out about uncomfortable subjects like white privilege;
- ▣ Express solidarity with social change efforts outside the food system;
- ▣ Understand, support, and raise up accomplishments of community partners;
- ▣ Negotiate meaningful ways to set and evaluate goals;
- ▣ Share resources in ways that are transparent and accountable;
- ▣ Provide stable support for projects;
- ▣ Avoid creating solutions in search of a problem;
- ▣ Ask whether your organization has benefited from damage done to others
- ▣ Work to repair past damage, both that in which institutional partners share culpability and that in which they may not.

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ⁱ (Guthman 2008b, 2008c, 2008d, 2012; Allen and Guthman 2006; DFJ 2013; DuPuis, Harrison, and Goodman 2011; Freudenberg, McDonough, and Tsui 2011; Gliessman 2010; Gottlieb and Joshi 2010)

ⁱⁱ (Redmond 2012; Clough 2009; Pratt 2009; van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth 1996; Walkerdine 2010)

ⁱⁱⁱ (Akram-Lodhi 2013; Guthman 2004; Guthman, Morris, and Allen 2006; Green, Green, and Kleiner 2011)

^{iv} (Schor 2010; Schor and Thompson 2014; Gowan and Slocum 2014; Hinrichs 2000)

^v (Harrison 2008; Jepson 2005; Li 2011; Lo and Jacobson 2011; Qazi and Scholten 2005; Vallianatos et al. 2004; Shreck, Getz, and Feenstra 2006; Sellers and Asbed 2011; Allen 2003, 2004; Mitchell 1996, 2013)

^{vi} (Guthman 2011)

^{vii} (Allen and Wilson 2008; Clancy 1994; McClintock 2012; Reid 2003; Green, Green, and Kleiner 2011)

^{viii} (O'Neill 2011; Deutsch 2004, 2010, 2011)