

Food Justice: Beyond Food Security

Objectives:

1. To understand the difference between food security and food justice
2. To understand what food justice looks like for farm workers

Why do we talk about food justice?

Food justice is the next step after talking about food security. While immediate needs are crucial, generally speaking, “the concept of food security...has largely sidestepped a structural analysis of hunger. The result has been a focus on feeding hungry people rather than altering the production relations and modes of governance that underpin food security.”¹

Once we have understood the injustices that lie at the center of our food system for farm workers, we can start to understand a little better the *why*? What are the systems at play on a broader scale that are putting pressure on our society to create these harsh environments that are based on exploitation?

The food justice movement:

- Denounces the ways people of color and underserved communities in rural and urban areas are abused by the present food system,
- Introduces the idea of a grassroots-driven shift to a more equitable and sustainable food *system*,
- Promotes local production, processing, and consumption of food,
- Focuses on the the right to food, better safety nets, and more citizen involvement in decisions regarding community food systems, and is
- Active in local, state, and national political arenas.”²

We characterize food justice as ensuring that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed, and eaten are shared justly.

What are some of the root causes?

“So for me, food justice is right at the core of this...it all comes down to the fact that 100 years ago, there were a lot of exclusions that happened because our food system was so connected to this awful legacy of slavery. Today we're dealing with the effects of that and so food justice, it's gonna mean not only ensuring that workers are being treated fairly and being treated with dignity and respect but that we're also bringing into account that the land needs to be cared for in a very specific way so that we can continue to have food on our tables. Consumers need to ask that question. Where did my food come from? How were the people who were picking these fruits and vegetables treated? *This is food justice.*”³ - Reyna Lopez, *Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN)*

¹ Agyeman, Julian, and Alison Hope Alkon. *Cultivating Food Justice*. MIT Press, 2011. page 122

² Agyeman, Julian, and Alison Hope Alkon. *Cultivating Food Justice*. MIT Press, 2011. page 323

³ Cerkleski, Mallory Rose, and Reyna Lopez. “National Farm Workers Ministry and PCUN Interview for Harvest of Justice (Food Justice) 2021.”20 May 2021.

Some current day causes:

- Consolidation of power/vertical integration, corporate ownership of the entire food chain: from farm to table (Walmart, Tyson),⁴
- A food economy driven *solely* by shareholder profit and not stakeholder benefit,
- Structural racism built on a foundation of strategic exploitation of black, brown, immigrant, and native peoples,
- A lack of transparency across the system, and
- The spread of a culture of divisiveness and scarcity.

These give rise to the advantage of some at the expense of others. People are pitted against people, sector against sector. Essential human rights are discredited as we ignore the interconnectedness of whole systems. Working people do not have power to change the system and remain marginalized by design. It's also important to note that the very same mechanisms that have led to the need for food justice have given rise as well to the need for racial and environmental justice. The negative impacts of climate change, failure to recycle society's wastes, and infrastructure deterioration fall most heavily on low income communities of color while threatening the present and future health of all living beings."⁵

Food desert or food apartheid?

Many of us have heard about "food deserts," or areas with poor access to healthy food. Typically "food desert" maps highlight the locations of grocery stores and transit lines, and initiatives that come out of these projects might include increasing transit access in a given area or establishing pop-up markets in a "food desert."

In contrast, the term "food apartheid" is used to highlight the racially discriminatory political structures that, in the past and present, impact food access and control. Food apartheid looks at the whole food system and takes into account income, race, and geography. It encompasses the social and racial inequalities that are at play. It recognizes that the systems in place are what make it difficult for people living in low-income areas to access fresh, healthy food.⁶ The fight to end "food apartheid" is community driven. Efforts burgeon from local cries to redistribute power and dismantle oppressive political and economic structures which disempower communities of color. ⁷

What does food justice look like for farm workers?

"In order to promote food justice in rural California communities directly engaged in producing the country's food, food justice advocates, planners, and policymakers must focus on the real challenges facing farm workers. The solutions must include a vision for healthy, affordable housing; rural transit development; and access to healthcare, water, waste water systems, paved roads, sidewalks, streetlights as well as healthy food options for all rural residents. Advocates of "smart growth" and farmland preservation must also take farm worker communities into account. It is incumbent on the food justice movement to incorporate real farm worker needs into its advocacy in order to promote broader food system transformation for the wellbeing of all people."⁸ *Rosalinda Guillen, the daughter of a farm worker family and founder of Community to Community*

⁴ Hendrickson M.K., James H.S., Heffernan W. (2018) Vertical Integration and Concentration in US Agriculture. In: Thompson P., Kaplan D. (eds) Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6167-4_216-2

⁵ AJP, "What We Do." *Agricultural Justice Project*, www.agriculturaljusticeproject.org/en/about/.

⁶ "Food Apartheid: Why We Should Change the Way We Talk about Food Deserts." The Green Urban Lunch Box, 17 June 2020, thegreenurbanlunchbox.com/food-apartheid-why-we-should-change-the-way-we-talk-about-food-deserts

⁷ <https://utenvironment.org/projects/micrmm/food-justice/glossary/food-apartheid-not-desert/>

⁸ Wadsworth, Gail. "What Does Food Justice Mean for Farmworkers?" *Food First*, foodfirst.org/what-does-food-justice-mean-for-farmworkers/.

Farmworker Association of Florida (FWAF)

“Food justice has become a term that's used a lot now. And I think in some areas, it has too superficial a meaning. Some companies now, like restaurants or Aramark, might be talking about food justice, but they think about it in narrow terms like food justice is giving people a better wage, or, giving people the worker protection standard, for instance, just giving better protections for workers, [in our opinion] that doesn't go deep enough....To get real justice, you have to really connect with people and know people have a voice.

So food justice means all workers all along the food chain. [Additionally, for us] it goes deeper than that-- it includes honoring the earth, and the animals as well. It means making sure that people are part of the decision making, and not just looking at workers as commodities that are being [used for] their labor to be part of this capitalist system of promoting this, our capitalist markets. So the workers need to be part of the solution. They need to be included at all levels.

And so that's so justice is not just about wages, it's not just about working conditions. It means giving control to the people, giving a voice to the people, listening to them, and not just listening to them, they need to be part of the decision making.”⁹ - *Jeannie Economos, FWAF*

Agricultural Justice Project¹⁰

“I view justice of any sort whether it's racial justice or economic justice or environmental justice or food justice, in the context of that work, there are disparities, right? There are certain groups or certain people [who] are advantaged by that system and others are not. Typically when you're talking about justice there's a few who are advantaged in whatever system you're talking about and there are many who are disadvantaged by that system. So justice is about changing those systemic factors that create that kind of disparity. And so you can see how those are overlapping right? Food sovereignty and food justice because if sovereignty is looking at control, one of the disparities that we know exists and creates situations that result in food insecurity, particularly for those who work in the food system, who are likely to be more insecure than the general population. It is a staggering statistic, that the people who feed us are less likely to be able to feed themselves. Those systems created that insecurity and those disparities with regards to food insecurity, and so food justice is about eliminating those disparities.”¹¹ - *Leah Cohen, AJP*

Reflection questions:

- What are the risks and benefits of how food is:
 - Grown?
 - Transported?
 - Distributed?
 - Accessed?
 - Prepared?
 - Eaten?

⁹ Cerkleski, Mallory Rose, and Jeannie Economos. “National Farm Workers Ministry and Farmworker Association of Florida Interview for Harvest of Justice (Food Justice) 2021.” 22 Apr. 2021.

¹⁰ What is AJP? In the words of Leah “And we are a nonprofit that works towards justice in the food system, a food system that's based in empowerment and fairness for everyone, from those who work in the fields in agriculture to those who stop grocery store shelves and everyone in between. And that includes all of those people who work throughout the food system also in their capacity as workers and dedicating their life to producing food for all of us, but also in their capacity as eaters of food.”

¹¹ Cerkleski, Mallory Rose, and Leah Cohen. “National Farm Workers Ministry and Agricultural Justice Project Interview for Harvest of Justice (Food Justice) 2021.” 28 Apr. 2021.

Action Ideas:

- Learn more about the certification programs that NFWM endorses:
 - [Agricultural Justice Project](#)
 - [Equitable Food Initiative](#)
 - [Fair Food Program](#)
 - [Milk with Dignity](#)

- Contact your representatives and advocate for farm workers
- Submit an op-ed to your local newspaper to help educate others about [issues affecting farm workers](#).
- Find and get involved with community based gardens in your area
- Shop locally at farmers markets or sign up for a local CSA where you can go and see and speak to the farmer. Ask about the standards and labor conditions of their workers.
 - [Find a CSA near you](#)
 - [Find a farmer's market near you](#)

Learn More:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tw2l78v4ds8>
- <https://www.chelseagreen.com/2014/food-justice/>
- Podcast: <https://www.guernicamag.com/karen-washington-its-not-a-food-desert-its-food-apartheid>

Prayer:

God of soil and rain, God of seed and pod,

We thank you for all the good food this earth provides.

We thank you for the hands of those who plant, cultivate, and harvest that food.

We thank you for the ones who pack and ship, who deliver and sell the nutritious food we need.

And we pray that every person who is part of every step along the food chain is valued, well paid, supported, and given their own access to this good food.

For the glory of God,

Amen.