
Food and Justice: The Critical Link to Healthy Communities

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The possibility of achieving environmental justice is intertwined with policies that are designed and implemented in a manner that both mimics and protects the Earth's ecosystems. While it is true that most "native" or "indigenous" people have historically honored Mother Earth and Father Sky, it is also true that, from the earliest times, we have degraded the ecosystems to which we are intimately interconnected. It is not until recent historical times, however, that human activities have accelerated to the extent of threatening the existence of life on this planet.

From a spiritual and "religious" point of view, we have lost our intimate contact with, and sacred notions of, the natural world. They have been replaced with a notion of "civilization" and "religion" that has disconnected the mind from the body and humans from the natural world. It is the dominant paradigm to worship at the altar of science, technology, and money at the expense of the environment. Though it is impossible to return to the way things used to be, it is possible to incorporate the wisdom of the ancients into our current policies and our future policies and practices.

Though some sustainable policies and practices have been designed and implemented, it is important to note that there are no industrial or economic practices that are entirely environmentally benign. To protect the environment it is logical to modify those human activities (industrial, economic, or otherwise) in a way that minimizes the amount of damage and has the smallest possible ecological "footprint."¹ Current levels of resource allocation are unjust. To reduce the human ecological footprint in ways that are just and sustainable will require a dramatic paradigm shift from the dominant ruling social, political, and economic order. Achieving the goal of environmental (or social or economic) justice will require a

monumental shift in the prevailing psychological and spiritual elements of global society.

The current dominant global regime is relentless in its attack on all cultural, spiritual, and psychological patterns that are incompatible with the global homogeneity sought by corporate governments and their handlers: the global corporate elites. International social, psychological, cultural, spiritual, economic, and political actions will have to become grounded in the realization that we are all interconnected and should be viewed in the way the great Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn calls "inter-beings." With this knowledge of our interconnectedness, and if we are to achieve any real and lasting justice (environmental or otherwise), we must make a commitment to developing ways of sheltering, feeding, clothing, transporting, educating, recreating, and praying that honor our intimate relationships with one another.

Achieving environmental justice is not enough. The solutions required to overcome global environmental, social, economic, cultural, and psychological problems cannot be accomplished by the movement for justice as it is currently structured. It is not a question of where nuclear waste should be stored; it is a question of stopping the production of additional waste. (See Benford's chapter in this volume.) Justice must be extended to the generations of the next millennia and that can only be done by protecting the natural heritage that we have inherited. The quest for justice is not just a contemporary trend; it is an intergenerational event that does not benefit one group or another but rather applies to all.

The global food system provides us with an opportunity to apply advanced and sophisticated approaches to overcoming injustices. Moving beyond environmental justice means that we must begin to advocate and apply a wide-ranging strategic and tactical approach to problems that render solutions that encompass all areas of human activity while protecting the ecosystems with which we are interdependent. Let us end the notion of disproportionate impacts and move toward a goal of no impacts.

The essence of moving to a more sophisticated movement is characterized by becoming oriented toward solutions and solving problems for all communities. Fighting to maintain the moratorium on landfills on Chicago's southeast side or shutting down the municipal incinerator on the west side is only partial justice. It raises the specter that the fight will continue in

another community, because we know that injustice follows the path of least resistance. Strategies for managing waste must be developed and implemented that reduce greatly or eliminate the problem so that no community is faced with the burden of handling waste. The solutions must be applied to the global community. That is real justice; justice beyond current applications of environmental justice.

Focusing on Food

Industrial agriculture that is replacing smaller-scale models contributes dramatically to the much larger ecological footprint of the "developed" countries of the global North, including the United States. The large footprint of industrial agriculture can be largely attributed to its reliance on petroleum and petrochemicals for much of its operations. The operations reliant on petroleum-based products include fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, the operation of agricultural machinery, and transportation.

The importance of food to life itself, as well to the overall health profile of a community, makes it as important an element for vigilance by the activist and academic communities as any other. Air for breathing, water for proper functioning at the cellular level, and food for energy required for all aspects of life demand that their sources be protected and that these resources be available to all in a just and secure manner.

The environmental justice movement can ill afford not to be vigilant about every aspect of the food system. The movement must protect the health of landowners and land workers alike, protect the soil and the waterways, and ensure that farmers and farm workers are paid fair and equitable wages for their work. To fail in this regard would be a monumental disaster and would seriously damage the credibility of the movement. This chapter offers a critical examination of how we feed ourselves and offers some suggestions for solving the environmental and environmental justice problems associated with the dominant model of industrial agriculture.

Food and Justice

Industrial agriculture at all levels of operations produces a negative impact on human and environmental health (Kimbrell 2002). An unhealthy environment places humans at risk for a host of health problems, just as other

living beings are at risk when their environment becomes unhealthy. Whether it is a pond, a forest, or an ocean, when an ecosystem is degraded it has a negative impact upon the community of plants and animals occupying it.

Industrial agriculture is a major source of environmental—and, by extension, human—degradation. The proliferation and accumulation of pollutants due to the use of herbicides and pesticides has created numerous events of ground and surface water pollution (Carson 1962; Hynes 1989; Phipps and Crosson 1986; Pimental and Lehman 1993; Pimental 1992; Soule 1990). Furthermore, the industrial or factory farms for poultry, cattle, and hogs create a monumental environmental threat. Likewise, farmers and farm workers display a variety of symptoms from their exposure to the compounds that produce agricultural inputs such as herbicides and pesticides. The exposure of agricultural sector workers manifests itself in an array of disorders among the workers (Donham 1993; Garry 1996; Hoar 1986; Larson 2001) and in the surrounding rural communities (Gladden 1998; Wing 2000; Thu 1997). The literature is replete with farm workers reporting symptoms from pesticide exposures. The stated concern of the environmental justice movement about protecting people where they live, work, play, learn, and pray is no more compelling anywhere than it is with respect to pesticides in the agricultural (and non-agricultural) setting. Moving beyond environmental justice in this instance means supporting agricultural policies such as organic agricultural techniques in an effort to drastically reduce if not eliminate pesticide use.

Resource depletion such as the loss of topsoil is another negative environmental outcome of the industrial agricultural system. When considered in the context of food production, topsoil ranks near the top (next to water) of the assets we acquire from nature. Loss of agricultural land due to residential or industrial “development” is also a global problem. As many communities expand or sprawl into natural or agricultural lands, they are lost to production for a very long time, if not forever.

The Food Environment and Community Access

The case has been made that food access is an environmental justice issue. Recent research by Kimberly Morland and her associates demonstrates that there is a probable link between higher incidences of various diseases and a distinct lack of access to quality food. The corollary is that there is a link between lower incidences of various disease outcomes in the white com-

munity and greater access to quality food and a comparative lower rate of liquor stores (Moreland 2002a). The findings of the research confirmed scientifically what has been known empirically: that there is indeed a dearth of quality food establishments in African-American communities. The study indicates that produce consumption rose by 32 percent for each additional supermarket in the black community, while in the white community the comparable increase was only 11 percent (Moreland 2002b). Fat (a major contributor to obesity, a risk factor for cardiovascular disease) is readily available through the various purveyors of fast and “ethnic” foods found in the community. Grocery stores and supermarkets, on the other hand, can facilitate more healthful food consumption practices. For example, the Morland (2002b) study found that the presence of at least one supermarket in a black neighborhood was associated with a 25 percent increase in the number of residents who limited their fat intake. The shortage of purveyors of quality food within the African-American community is a contributing factor to the overall poor health outcomes in the national black community. Communities have the intellect and the capacity to design and implement the institutional changes required to ensure the kind of nutritional and food environment essential to improved public health incomes leading to healthy communities. These changes are compatible with (rather than inconsistent with) other environmental and ecological improvements that must take place for a whole systems approach to developing healthy and sustainable communities. Local examples of solution-oriented approaches conceived by communities are offered in the next sections.

In the rest of this chapter I present a modest proposal for such a project. I believe that a coalition of groups, organizations and institutions will be necessary to achieve the desired results: a just, equitable and secure food system that has broad implications locally, regionally, nationally, and globally.

The Disappearing Black Farmer as a Human Metaphor for All Limited Resource Production Farmers

People of African descent have experienced a loss of land that makes them essentially a “landless” people. According to a June 1985 *Ebony* article titled “The Disappearing Black Farmer,” between 1920 and 1978 the number of black farmers declined from 926,000 to 57,000. During that same period, land ownership among black farmers declined from 15 million to

4.5 million acres. In 1997 there were only 18,451 black farmers in the United States (compared to 1,882,652 white farmers), indicating a continuing precipitous decline. Of all black farms, 93 percent were in 15 southern states, and, significantly, the states with the weakest tradition of slavery and plantation agriculture (Florida, Texas, and Oklahoma) experienced the smallest declines between 1982 and 1997. Texas, the state with the largest number of black farmers, experienced an increase in this population, making it the only state not to experience a decline. Black farms totaled approximately 2,080,112 acres in 1997 (Wood and Gilbert 2002).

The problems that have plagued black farmers, such as the lack of access to capital and the indifference and downright complicity in the loss of land by governmental agencies, remain in place (EWG 2004). Others have a more recent experience of displacement, such as immigrants from Mexico and Central America who have been removed from the land by industrial and corporate agricultural conglomerates putting at risk ancient indigenous agricultural systems. Many of these immigrants may now be found hard at work in some restaurant kitchen or dirty factory job, knowledge withering on the vine.

Now we are all part of the labor pool, competing with each other for our souls in metropolitan areas across the United States in clusters of under and unemployment wanting desperately to be found "qualified" and bestowed the gift of a job. What we need is life giving and affirming institutions; the environmental, social, and economic justice movement's call for jobs is not enough. Rather, healthy communities where people are free from toxic exposures through their food, air, water, or the land is what the struggle is truly all about.

The plight of black farmers underscores the plight of all farmers, regardless of race, with limited resources. It requires infrastructure investment and acquisition for farmers to bring their production crops to market. The infrastructure required is also an issue for those urban communities that require greater access to food and food security in their quest for healthy and livable communities.

Sustainable and Just Food Systems: A Proposed Model

An ecologically responsible agricultural system will be at its core both urban and rural and, to the greatest extent possible, organic. The scale of

the individual agricultural operations of such a system should be small to medium-size and should have a regional and local market focus. While industrial agriculturalists who farm organically do not use pesticides, they essentially function the same as conventional agribusinesses by squeezing out the smaller players. For example, Horizon, a Colorado company, controls 70 percent of the "organic" dairy market. They over process milk (ultra pasteurized) supplied from cows that, although fed organic grains, are locked in lots without being allowed to roam freely in pasture. The fact that "organic" food has been co-opted to such a large degree is not surprising when you realize that the organic niche is the fastest growing food sector, worth billions of dollars. The big boys see a cash cow, not a principled way of life that protects the ecosystem or the humans who work in the fields.

Small and medium-size farmers who have formed the backbone of an organic alternative to industrial agriculture deserve the support of local and regional markets that consciously buy their products and help to ensure their survival. Elements of the proposed system of sustainable agriculture would, for example, foster the reestablishment and proliferation of family farms. New farm families would be developed from several sources, including immigrant farmers, agricultural students from regional or special programs established to develop new farmers, and urban dwellers who may be compelled to return to a more rural lifestyle. This element of the proposal would incorporate a program that would function as the equivalent of a domestic agricultural Peace Corps (Ag Corp or perhaps Food Corp) where farmers and farm workers would be trained and then assigned to various regions of the country to establish farms (urban and rural), primarily for the production of food crops.

The Politics of Health and Nutrition

The role of several institutional entities in the design and implementation of sustainable food systems is critical. The most important institutions include the following.

Foundations

These institutions are needed to provide seed funding for various elements of food system projects such as land acquisition (urban and rural), training programs, infrastructure, equipment, seeds, research protocols, etc.

Foundations will need to change their funding approach by supporting development programs based upon research and entrepreneurship rather than social service and charity.

Universities

On-campus and off-campus facilities would be designed to assist in developing various aspects of a just and ecologically oriented agricultural system. It should be noted that many of the major land grant institutions might not be part of the institutional framework because of conflicts with the work done for the biotech and conventional agricultural system. Many of these institutions are beginning to develop an interest in more suitable forms of agriculture, which is cause for optimism. Smaller public and private institutions may form the backbone of this element of the project. Universities perform an important research function, particularly in regard to developing research protocols and providing technical assistance on various elements of an emerging urban agricultural system.

Government

At all levels of government (municipal, county, state, and federal) there must be some assistance for the development of the system outlined above. If government can provide assistance to corporations and other special interest groups, it can surely provide assistance for community food programs. Equity in this realm necessitates communities receiving a return on the revenue that they have produced to support community-based (local and regional) initiatives such as farms (urban and rural), grocery stores, and other food related businesses. The Bethel New Life (BNL) organization in Chicago offers an example of how government can work with communities to create progressive commercial operations in communities. (See the chapter by Lee in this volume.) BNL is receiving substantial funding of \$4.5 million dollars from a combination of local, state, and federal sources for a 23,000-square-foot "smart, green" building that will house a child and infant daycare center, employment services, and five storefronts. Assistance can be provided in the form of tax incentives, grants, infrastructure construction and improvements, and other forms of technical support. The right to food choices must also be reiterated; corporations must not be able to dictate what we eat and who has fair and equitable

access to the health and life giving properties of high quality food. Brownfield redevelopment in urban centers is one example of how the government can provide assistance for urban communities by providing space for large-scale operations and providing funding for cleanup of contaminated sites. Brownfield sites could be utilized after cleanup for greenhouse and hydroponic projects. Greenhouse projects located near landfills could utilize potential energy sources, such as methane that is otherwise burned off, to heat massive greenhouse structures that could, for example, be a place to produce seed starts for agricultural and ornamental plants.

Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)

NGOs and/or nonprofit organizations are pivotal in the organization of a widespread food ecosystem that will provide food security and vastly improve the prospects for healthy communities. Organizations that focus on various issues will be required to become partners in a coalition of institutions and organizations to facilitate meaningful social and policy changes. Organizations such as the American Farmland Trust would be utilized to save farmlands from "developers" and other proponents of sprawl.

Farm cooperatives and consumer outlets such as food cooperatives, natural foods groceries, and even larger chain grocers are important elements in the process of developing an ecologically and human oriented food ecosystem. Farm cooperatives could work directly with food cooperatives, natural foods grocers, and distributors to provide a range of food items that coop members and conscientious consumer's desire. All of this could be linked by community-based distribution and warehouse operations that serve the network of community-based grocery stores and food coops. A wonderful example of the potential for these kinds of relationships to develop can be found in Virginia. In a project created to assist tobacco farmers to convert to other crops, the nonprofit organization Appalachian Sustainable Development formed a group of farmers that grow a variety of organic produce. The organization markets their products under the label Appalachian Harvest in a local grocery chain named Food City. The project sells products to stores and restaurants in Virginia, in North Carolina, in Washington, and as far away as Philadelphia (Halweil 2003).

In Massachusetts, a nonprofit organization called Red Tomato provides opportunities for small farmers to market their produce to stores in the Northeast. With assistance from Oxfam, Red Tomato supported African-American farmers from the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, encouraging them to add seedless watermelons to their product line. These smaller farmers, usually left out of the markets monopolized by large agribusiness, were able to make a profit and serve satisfied consumers.

Nonprofit organizations with the mission of providing management and organizational technical assistance would be utilized for assisting a variety of organizations to enhance their capacity to do the work. Coalition and capacity building are critical to ensuring the security and safety of our food supply. Alternative systems require interlinked strategies and commitments just like mainstream institutions. Activists and advocacy organizations must begin to forge serious policy and institutional development strategies if the movement for justice is to be effective.

Financial and Investment Institutions

A sustainable financial plan must be developed and financial institutions must be involved to provide the capital assistance required to purchase land, to manufacture and purchase equipment, to design and build farm buildings, and to develop transportation and distribution centers. It is imperative that we find or formulate the expertise required to create community development credit unions and development banks, which will provide the financial backing for family farms, community-based natural foods grocery stores, and other components of sustainable food systems. Then we have to buy and invest in locally grown produce, bread baked in local bakeries and in small community-based grocery stores. We cannot design nor proliferate the urban agricultural systems that will be heavily dependent upon greenhouses, hydroponics and land purchases without a capital investment strategy. The activist/advocacy community often loathes the thought of seeking support from business leaders. This distaste is not unwarranted, but the movement must begin to understand and operate from a position that a business culture can be created that is indeed palatable and just. Our future and the future of the other sentient beings with which we share the planet depend upon a shift in our finan-

cial behavior. There can be no environmental justice without economic or social justice.

Discussion

Food and farming offer a unifying point for a movement that is multicultural, anti-racist, and anti-sexist and that embraces all aspects of the environmental justice movement. Few other projects can advocate worker protection, land and water conservation, pollution prevention, public health, and urban-rural connections the way food and farming can. All of these elements that form the core concerns of the environmental justice movement crystallize around food and farming, making it an area of human activity that all advocates and activists working on behalf of environmental, social, and economic justice should readily support.

Critical first steps have been taken in the struggle to create healthy and sustainable communities and secure local food environments. Food is the frontline element in our overall health outcomes. The envisioned agricultural program will improve the economic and community development profile, create new employment opportunities, and improve the public health conditions in both urban and rural communities. As Shuman (2000) pointed out, "small scale systems to grow, process and market food are becoming not only cost-effective—in both rural and urban areas—but also essential to preserve the genetic integrity of the world's edible plants."

A decidedly more local and regional agricultural system has major implications for a range of goals, such as the reduction of various pollution sources, positive public health benefits for those employed in the agricultural sector, increased employment opportunities for urban communities suffering from higher than average rates of unemployment, and an increase in food security due to risk reduction that would be caused by interruptions in the food chain.

That is what is meant by "beyond environmental justice." As an activist for environmental, social, and economic justice and as well as a socially engaged Buddhist practitioner, I am bound to advocate on behalf of all things sentient and non-sentient. As stewards of the land and justice we are also bound to protect all sentient beings and the environment.

In the next section I present a case study of a food system collaborative that is trying to put these ideas to work.

Local Case Study: The Chicago Food System Collaborative

The Chicago Food System Collaborative (CFSC) is an emerging model that is combining many of the elements discussed above. The CFSC is a community and university partnership whose stated goal is "to improve the quality, accessibility and safety of food choices for Chicago residents."

CFSC was created via meetings and discussions that arose out of the Chicago Community Food Security Roundtable (CCFSR). The collaborative framework was formulated through a consortium of Chicago-area universities, the Policy Research Action Group (PRAG). PRAG was founded in 1989 as a noble attempt to ameliorate what historically were difficult and frequently one-sided university and community research collaborations. (See chapters in this volume by Bryant and Hockman and by Cable et al.) Under the auspices of PRAG, universities, churches, farmers, and non-governmental organizations have come together around this effort.

Out of the meetings and discussions surrounding of the CCFSR, the Collaborative was created with three primary goals:

1. The development of a system to provide access to fresh, organic foods supplied by local farmers. The approach is a strategy to support a local farmers market, support urban agriculture and develop a local grocery store with a focus on natural, minimally processed foods.
2. The initiation of a public policy discussion that could support the development of sustainable projects and build consensus among stakeholders in the food policy arena.
3. The creation of a food security research agenda designed to enhance short-term community food choices and develop long-term strategies for food safety and security.

The mixed-income African-American community of Austin on the West Side of Chicago was chosen as the first neighborhood for the CFSC project. In addition to the farmers market and the development of the grocery store, the CFSC is conducting several research projects utilizing survey methods and the development of maps utilizing Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Another fascinating aspect of the project is the School-Based Nutrition Program (SBNP). The SBNP will address the growing public con-

cern with obesity in general but in school-age children in particular, assess the quality of the dietary intake of school-age participants, and evaluate the effect of a multi-tiered school-based nutrition program in reducing the impact of poor or marginal dietary quality. The program was initiated in one public and one parochial school in the Austin community.

Data are beginning to emerge about various aspects of the food environment of the Austin community. For example, community members recruited by the Westside Health Authority teamed up with students from Loyola and Chicago State universities (all three are PRAG partner organizations) to visit every store in Austin and the bordering suburban and largely white community of Oak Park, Illinois to begin an intensive study of food availability. The teams visited a total of 134 stores in the two communities, gathering data on the availability and price of food from a list of 102 basic food items (Block 2004).

One of the findings from the research was that a major difference exists between the food environment of Oak Park (a suburban community) and Austin, even though Oak Park sits on the western border of Chicago and is adjacent to Austin. Austin has many more outlets selling food than Oak Park, with 95 of the 134. Of the 95 stores, 50 were small "mom and pop" stores and 19 were liquor stores that also sold food items. Austin's food environment included only one chain grocer, two chain discount grocers, and three independent grocers. The researchers looked at how the stores in the two communities differed in terms of price and availability of produce. The data revealed that the chain grocer in Austin carried almost every item on the list of 102 basic food products. By contrast, the discount chains and small stores were missing a vast number of products from the list and the discount grocers did not carry culturally significant (in the African-American community) items such as greens. The most striking finding is that produce determined to be of poor quality was found only in the Austin food environment and organic food was virtually unavailable.

Overall prices were lower in Austin, however the variables that perhaps explain that difference are the availability of food from discount outlets and lower prices for meat and produce in the independent groceries and small stores, in contrast to the prices in the chain groceries. The quality of goods in the Austin food environment are unquestionably inferior when compared to the Oak Park food environment. This is with great probability one feature

in the leakage of dollars spent on food by Austin residents in nearby communities such as Oak Park.

Having demonstrated a real need for quality food in the African-American community of Austin, I enlisted as the organizer and manager of the Austin Farmers Market for the CFSC. In addition to providing produce and meats direct to consumers, we also broker arrangements that allow farmers to sell products to local stores and restaurants. This role provides me with interesting insight into many of the impediments faced by small, limited resource producers in getting their products to market. The impediments include inadequate labor to assist in harvesting and packing for market, the lack of refrigerated transport, the need for assistance to pay for fees and insurance, and the need for housing for those farmers wishing to sell at multiple markets.

It is clear that a huge paradigm and policy shift will be needed to make healthy food available to low-income communities of color and to support small farmers in their efforts to sustain their livelihoods. The Chicago Community Food Security Roundtable (CCFSR) is an important first step that manifests many of the aforementioned elements, including universities, governmental agencies, non-governmental agencies, and foundations, in an effort to create an emerging environmentally, socially, and economically just food environment for underserved communities. Much work is still ahead in developing healthy communities with sound food environments, but with collective participation and effort many beneficial changes lie ahead. As evidence is gathered regarding what is needed to ensure vibrant communities that are ecologically and economically sustainable, from field to table, the future looks bright for all.²

Notes

1. The ecological footprint is a tool used for calculating the amount of ecological resources required to support a human in a particular society. The ecological footprint of a person in the United States measured in hectares is 9.72. The global average is 2.03 hectares.

2. Maps and printed materials regarding the Chicago Food System Collaborative are available through Maureen Hellwig of the Policy and Research Action Group at Loyola University.

9

Autonomy, Equity, and Environmental Justice

Devon G. Peña

Sharing the Fate of Others?

The discourses of environmental justice (EJ), which rose to prominence in the late 1980s, transformed much of ecological thinking and politics in North America and other parts the world (Gottlieb 1993; Taylor 2000; Peña 2003a). EJ discourses challenged environmental thinkers to reconsider the meaning of basic concepts like nature, environment, ecosystem, wilderness, and biodiversity; they forced many to consider the role of race, ethnicity, national origin, class, gender, and culture in the framing of environmental history, environmental ethics, and ecological politics (Cronon 1996; see also Milton 1996). EJ discourses recentered the problematic of ecological politics in the constellation of cultural differences that construct variant epistemologies of nature (i.e., as natural resource, commodity, wilderness, ecosystem, and homeland). Recall Rama Guha's (1989) notion that the wilderness of the nature-appreciating eco-tourist from the First World is the homeland of the displaced native in the Third World. The local is denied access to the means of right livelihood, the collective resources of the land, and the memories of place that sustain her identity, and all because of unjust acts of brutal enclosure for the sake of "economic development" or "wilderness preservation." (See also Peña 1992.)

Many EJ theorists analyze ecological problems by relying on a social justice critique of environmental racism, which is defined as procedural, organizational, and geographic inequities expressed in persistent patterns of institutionalized discrimination in environmental policy making and decision making. The chief culprit behind discriminatory and disparate impacts is the state as embodied in the norms, values, administrative practices, and