



Ending the injustices that cause hunger.

**one does not sell  
the earth upon which  
the people walk**

Tashunka Witko, 1840 –1877

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## editorial : food justice and food sovereignty in usa

Food Sovereignty<sup>1</sup> emerged as La ViaCampesina's bold response to the "free trade" regimes destroying livelihoods around the world. It's been taken up widely across the Global South by communities reeling from the spread of agrofuels, GMOs, land grabs and the "privatization of everything."

One reason for food sovereignty's popularity is because neoliberal globalization has concentrated nearly half the planet's wealth into the hands of just 80 individuals. Food Sovereignty is the cry of the dispossessed.

Another reason is that food sovereignty reflects the deep resistance of people's historical struggles against exploitation, oppression and colonization. When communities fighting for their rights discover the principles of food sovereignty, their reaction is often "Yes! That's what we're doing!" On the front lines, the common roots of resistance are quickly recognized.

Food justice<sup>2</sup> is one such struggle. The radical roots of food justice in the United States are deep in the movement for Black Liberation. In the 1960s, following on historical traditions of self-care by African American communities, the Black Panthers brought food, health services, housing and education to their neighborhoods—placing them under community control. Food was one plank in a larger platform for liberation: freedom from hunger and police brutality were sovereign rights.

Today's struggles confront hunger and violence at the intersection of race, class and gender, driving Food Justice to its radical roots of resistance—and toward food sovereignty. In this edition, we share perspectives on the powerful and mutually enriching convergence of food justice and food sovereignty.

Eric Holt-Giménez, *Food First*

1 - <http://usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/what-is-food-sovereignty/>

2 - <http://foodfirst.org/issue-area/us-food-justice/>

## who we are

In the last years hundreds of organisations and movements have been engaged in struggles, activities, and various kinds of work to defend and promote the right of people to Food Sovereignty around the world. Many of these organisations were present in the *International Nyéléni Forum 2007* and feel part of a broader **Food Sovereignty Movement**, that considers the Nyéléni 2007 declaration as its political platform. **The Nyéléni Newsletter wants to be the voice of this international movement.**

Organisations involved: Development Fund, FIAN, Focus on the Global South, Food First, Friends of the Earth International, GRAIN, Grassroots International, IPC for food sovereignty, La Via Campesina, Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres, Oxfam Solidarity, Real World Radio, The World Forum Of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers, TNI, VSF-Justicia Alimentaria Global, WhyHunger.

**now is time for food sovereignty !**

## Definition of Food Justice

Food Justice refers to a wide spectrum of efforts that address injustices within the U.S. food system.

Weak forms of food justice focus on the effects of an inequitable food system, while stronger forms of food justice focus on the structural causes of those inequities.

For example, reformist projects for food justice work to provide food access in underserved communities to alleviate food insecurity and/or strive to improve food and labor conditions within the industrial food system through niche markets (e.g. organic and fair trade certification).



Progressive forms of food justice take this a step further by producing food (typically with organic, permaculture and/or agroecological methods) and working for more equitable access to food-producing resources such as land, credit and markets, and for better wages and working conditions for all farmworkers and food workers (not just those benefitting from niche markets).

Radical food justice focus on redistributive, structural transformations in the food system that build political power in underserved, exploited and oppressed communities—including people of color, immigrants, women, LGBTQ people—and works to dismantle the laws, regulations, institutions and cultural norms that entrench corporate, monopoly and white, male privilege in the food system.

Radical and progressive forms of food justice overlap with food sovereignty, a concept of international origin defined as people's right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.

# in the spotlight

1

## Racism and Capitalism

Our modern food system has co-evolved with 30 years of neoliberal globalization that privatized public goods and deregulated all forms of corporate capital, worldwide. This has led to the highest levels of global inequality in history. The staggering social and environmental costs of this transition have hit people of color the hardest, reflected in the record levels of hunger and massive migrations of impoverished farmers in the global South, and the appalling levels of food insecurity, diet-related diseases, unemployment, incarceration, and violence in underserved communities of color in the global North.

The U.S. food movement has emerged in response to the failings of the global food system. Everywhere, people and organizations are working to counteract the externalities inherent to the "corporate food regime." Understandably, they focus on one or two specific components—such as healthy food access, market niches, urban agriculture, etc.—rather than the system as a whole. But the structures that determine the context of these hopeful alternatives remain solidly under control of the rules and institutions of the corporate food regime.

Neoliberal globalization has also crippled our capacity to respond to the problems in the food system by destroying much of our public sphere. Not only have the health, education, and welfare functions of government been gutted; the social networks within our communities have been weakened, exacerbating the violence, intensifying racial tensions, and deepening cultural divides. People are challenged to confront the problems of hunger, violence, poverty, and climate change in an environment in which social and political institutions have been restructured to serve global markets rather than local communities.

Notably, the food justice movement has stepped up—supported largely by the non-profit sector—to provide services and enhance community agency in our food systems. Consciously or not, in many ways the community food movement, with its hands-on, participatory projects for a fair, sustainable, healthy food system, is rebuilding our public sphere from the ground up. This is simply because it is impossible to do one without reconstructing the other.

But as many organizations have discovered, we can't rebuild the public sphere without addressing the issues that divide us. For many communities this means addressing racism in the food system. The food movement itself is not immune from the structural injustices that it seeks to overcome. Because of the pervasiveness of white privilege and internalized oppression in our society, racism in the food system can and does resurface within the food movement itself, even when the actors have the best of intentions. Understanding why, where, and how racism manifests itself in the food system, recognizing it within our movement and our organizations and within ourselves, is not extra work for transforming our food system; it is the work. Understanding how capitalism functions is also the work, because changing the underlying structures of a capitalist food system is inconceivable without knowing how the system functions in the first place. And yet many people trying to change the food system have scant knowledge of its capitalist foundations.

Luckily, this is changing as activists in the food movement dig deeper to fully understand the system behind the problems they confront. Many people in the global South, especially peasants, fishers, and pastoralists, can't afford not to understand the socio-economic forces destroying their livelihoods. Underserved communities of color in the global North—there as the result of recent and historical waves of colonization, dispossession, and exploitation—form the backbone of the food justice movement. Understanding why people of color are twice as likely to suffer from food insecurity and diet-related disease—even though they live in affluent northern democracies—requires an understanding of the inter-section of capitalism and racism.

Activists across the food movement are beginning to realize that the food system cannot be changed in isolation from the larger economic system. To fully appreciate the magnitude of the challenges we face and what will be needed to bring about a new food system in harmony with people's needs and the environment, we need to understand and confront the social, economic, and political foundations that created—and maintain—the food system we seek to change.



## Reform or Transformation<sup>1</sup>?

The global food crisis has pushed the U.S. food movement to a political juncture. A sixth of the world's population is now hungry—just as a sixth of the U.S. population is “food insecure.” These severe levels of hunger and insecurity share root causes, located in the political economy of a global, corporate food regime.

Because of its political location between reformist calls for food security and radical calls for food sovereignty, food justice is pivotally placed to influence the direction of food-systems change. How issues of race and class are resolved will influence the political direction of the food justice movement's organizational alliances: toward reform or toward transformation.

Recognizing that today's industrial food system is unsustainable, the U.S. food movement calls for quality, environmental sustainability, and safety of food as well as for the reaffirmation of environmental values and community relationships associated with halcyon days of a reconstructed agrarian past. These make up what Alkon and Agyeman (2011a) refer to as the “dominant food-movement narrative.” Grounded in the social base of predominantly white, middle-class consumers, this narrative has become an important reference in the mainstream media. However, it also tends to render the food histories and realities of low-income people and people of color invisible.

Community Food Security (the “good food movement”) frames food-system inequities in terms of food production and acquisition rather than structural inequality, resulting in an emphasis on enhancing food skills and alternative means of food access for low-income households, coupled with a Washington D.C.-focused lobbying effort for increased forms of food aid and support for community food systems. The CFS movement strives to mainstream food security into the existing food system.

The food sovereignty movement seeks to dismantle global markets and the monopoly power of corporations at local, national, and international scales, and advocates redistributing and protecting productive assets such as seeds, water, land, and processing and distribution facilities. While anti-hunger and food-security advocates often prefer affordable access to bad food over no food at all, this puts them at odds with food-justice and food-sovereignty groups who distrust these large agrifood corporations (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010, 215).

The Food Justice movement (FJ) overlaps broadly with CFS, but tends to be more progressive than reformist in that it addresses specifically the ways in which people of color in low-income communities are disproportionately and negatively impacted by the industrial food system. Caught between the urgency of access and the imperative of equity, the food-justice movement shifts, overlaps, and bridges with the efforts of the CFS and food-sovereignty movements, attempting to address racism and classism on one hand while trying to fix a broken food system on the other.

While moderate food system reforms—such as increasing food stamps or relocating grocery stores—are certainly needed to help vulnerable communities cope with crises, because they address proximate rather than the root causes of hunger and food insecurity, they will not alter the fundamental balance of power within the food system and in some cases may even reinforce existing, inequitable power relations. Fixing the dysfunctional food system—in any sustainable sense—requires regime change. Food system change will come from powerful and sustained social pressure that forces reformists to roll back neo-liberalism in the food system. Much of this pressure could come from the food movement—if it overcomes its divides.

Solving the food crisis requires dismantling racism and classism in the food system and transforming the food regime. This challenges the food-justice movement to forge alliances that advance equitable and sustainable practices on the ground while mobilizing politically for broad, redistributive structural reforms. This pivotal praxis may yet produce a new, powerful food movement narrative: the narrative of liberation.

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## Food Justice 2.0

LaDonna Redmond, Founder and executive director of “The Campaign for Food Justice Now”, <http://www.cfn.org/>

I became a food activist because my son Wade developed food allergies at a very early age and I wanted to get the healthiest food I could for him. I really wasn't any different from any other mother in my community. I wanted the best for my son. But that food—the best food—was not available in my neighborhood on the west side of Chicago. I live in a community where I can get a semiautomatic weapon quicker than I can get a tomato. The public health issue of violence is connected to the public health issue of chronic diet-related diseases.

For me food justice 2.0 is really about the narratives of people of color. The food justice movement tells the story of colonialism and the impact of historical trauma on communities of color.

We understand that the importation of African slaves to the United States provided the labor for what we now call our industrial food system. At the core of what I believe to be the problems in our community, particularly when we talk about the accumulation of wealth or the lack of health, is really a conversation around slavery. We have not reconciled the event of slavery or its impact. For us, food justice is not just about nutrition. It's not just about growing the food. It's about dignity. It's about being visible.

We can be successful if we're able to recognize that we have never had a just food system in the U.S. and we must join together and create a narrative where all of us can sit around a table and create the food system that we need. Reclaim your kitchens. Reclaim your stove and your table. Cook your food. Make your food. Know where your food comes from.

Adapted from *Food + Justice = Democracy* presentation at TEDxManhattan, 2013

## Box 2

### The U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance: Nourishing Food Justice<sup>1</sup>

Resistance to the legacy of structural racism in the United States is an historical pillar of what we call “Food Justice.” The struggle for food justice takes place in the thousands of underserved rural and urban communities across the country—communities that are reeling from the negative impacts of the corporate food regime. The agrofood monopolies of this regime poison our workers and our environment with toxic chemicals to produce the cheap, processed food making us sick. Over 50 million people in the U.S.—mostly food and farm workers, women, children and people of color—are food insecure and suffer from devastating diet-related diseases. In the United States small-scale, family farmers now constitute less than 2% of all the registered farmers in the country... we have more people in prison than we do on the land. Food justice in the U.S. takes many forms to address these inequities head-on. Underserved communities are farming on vacant urban lots and roof tops, a new generation of young farmers are growing organic food for their communities, farmers markets and community supported agriculture and local food policy councils are flourishing and policy advocacy on issues such as migrant labor, environmental justice, GMO labeling and public health are becoming more powerful. In the last decade, the food justice movement has grown rapidly in the U.S. among communities that believe that our food system should serve—not exploit and poison—people of color. Many believe that radical food justice can be a path towards liberation. Thanks to the militant work of grassroots organizations, food justice is also being embraced by socially conscious consumers who demand chemical-free food, fair wages and dignified working conditions for workers. Everyone believes our family farmers should be paid fairly for the food they produce. Many are working to turn their local food systems into engines of economic growth under the control of underserved communities. All of us seek an end to corporate control over our food. Food should be for people, not monopoly profit.

It's no coincidence that with the rise of Food Sovereignty movement, Food Justice has also emerged as a concept, a form of resistance and as a political proposal on a global scale. The growing convergence between the two is the result of international exchanges and connections between local organizations with global social movements, especially La Via Campesina International. In part this is because on one hand, the creation of Via Campesina and the rise of food sovereignty have influenced scholars, NGOs and grassroots organizations. Also, with the advance of globalization, racism in the food system is worsening around the world.

### The U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance<sup>2</sup>

The U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA), is a broad-based network of 33 grassroots organizations and NGOs committed to building the collective power of the Food Justice and Food Sovereignty movements. The USFSA was born when farmers groups and community, labor and food security organizations met to discuss long-term actions to highlight the root causes of the 2008 global food crisis (that had been largely brought about by U.S. companies and U.S. policies). That summer was the first

meeting held by this working group in Washington, D.C. They called for a stronger policy agenda that included fair prices for farmers and consumers; equity in the food system; sustainable agriculture; workers' rights and the Right to Food.

In 2009, the Working Group on the Global Food Crisis brought even more people to Washington D.C. working in grassroots food justice organizations. Out of that gathering, participants launched a series of two year initiatives to support a campaign to end the food crisis. In October of 2009, a small sub-set of allies organized the First Food Sovereignty Prize in Des Moines, Iowa during the annual conference of the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC). The Food Sovereignty Prize became an important strategy to disseminate the concept of food sovereignty in the U.S. by highlighting the work of grassroots organizations. During the CFSC conference, members of the Working Group discussed a long-term vision and strategy that was based on the creation of a broader alliance with different sectors in the U.S.

Then, the group mobilized resources to support farmers' leadership in national agricultural anti-trust hearings organized by the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This was followed by holding a People's Movement Assembly on Food Justice and Food Sovereignty at the U.S. Social Forum in Detroit, Michigan in 2010. The need for a national alliance between migrant workers, farmers, urban families and NGOs to tackle the issues of food justice and food sovereignty became clear at this gathering. For two days grassroots organizations, farmers and NGOs from several cities in the U.S. as well as representatives of Via Campesina International from Honduras, Palestine, Haiti and the Dominican Republic met to discuss how local organizations could join a political process to radically democratize the food system, rooted in a global agenda set by social movements. Four months later, in October of 2010, the USFSA was launched at the CFSC conference in New Orleans.

### Looking ahead

Since the launching of the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance, food sovereignty and food justice in the country faces a new set of challenges. In the name of “fiscal austerity”, the National Congress threatens to cut thousands of families from food stamps and other social programs. Seven states in the U.S. have passed “gag” laws that prohibit the documentation and dissemination of wrongdoings by agribusinesses. A growing police state has declared war on young people of color. But also, signs of a new wave of popular, mass movements for #BlackLivesMatter, Climate Justice and actions against Monsanto have emerged and are growing fast.

This October, the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance will hold its III General Membership Assembly and the VII Food Sovereignty Prize in Des Moines, Iowa, October 13-15th. As we reach our five-year milestone, we are committed to our mission to build the global struggle for food justice and food sovereignty by steadily building trust and nourishing the leadership of working class families and communities of color to reclaim their lives and their bodies from structural racism. By bringing together NGOs and grassroots organizations in a broad alliance with different social sectors in the U.S. and abroad, the USFSA is an important space in the defense of justice and sovereignty.

1 - For more info on this article and the USFSA, please contact Saulo Araújo and Tristan Quinn-Thibodeau at WhyHunger.

2 - <http://usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/>

3 - <http://foodsovereigntyprize.org/>

# Voices from the field 2

## Community empowerment and resilience in Detroit

Malik Yakini, Founder and executive director of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, <http://detroitblackfoodsecurity.org/>

In Detroit, we currently have a population of about 700,000 people, which is down from 1,900,000. The city has been considerably depopulated as a result of the decline of the automobile industry and both the 1950s and 1960s white flight and more recently, black middle-class flight. We have massive unemployment, which is estimated to be anywhere between 18 and 20 percent. There are no major grocery store chains in Detroit. That leaves the majority of the population to get their food from gas stations and convenience stores. Much of the so-called food in those stores is in Styrofoam containers, boxes, and packages. The geographic footprint of the city is about 143 sq. miles. Of that 143 sq. miles, about one third of the city is vacant due to the depopulation and also the intentional disinvestment in the city of Detroit.

The reality of it is that Detroit and Detroiters are being spanked. And one of the reasons we're being spanked is because of the 50 year and beyond struggle for black empowerment in the city of Detroit. About 80 percent of the city's population is African American and we live in a metropolitan area that is one of the most highly racially polarized areas in the United States. We are now seeing many urban areas throughout Detroit being gentrified. We see young white hipsters moving into the core of the city and we see long-time residents being displaced. All of this is happening against the backdrop of one of the most insidious things that has happened in the United States and that is that the elected officials of Detroit have been disempowered by the appointment of an emergency manager by the governor of the state of Michigan. Effectively, the vote of the people of Detroit has been taken away.

Our organization has been working towards community empowerment and resilience. We are also concerned about creating democracy, the type of democracy where people are actually making decisions that impact their own communities and their own lives...We are fighting all of these struggles against the backdrop of these twin evils: capitalism and white supremacy, which manifests not only within the dominant industrial food system but also within our food movement and within the food sovereignty movement. We are concerned that we are all engaged in this work of divesting ourselves of internalized racial oppression. In fact, it's not auxiliary to the work. This is the work.

Adapted from presentation at "Food Sovereignty: a critical dialogue" conference at Yale University in 2013. For more <https://www.tni.org/en/article/food-sovereignty-critical-dialogue-0>



# Voices from the field 3

## Farm workers, a new sort of apartheid

Rosalinda Guillén, Executive director of Community to Community, <http://foodjustice.org/>

I am a farm worker that now understands that we are but one small but very, very important component of a system. I am connected to the history of slavery in the agricultural industry of this country because we are the new slaves. I can say as a Mexican American, there is a new group of slaves making the agricultural industry very rich in this country.

In many of the communities where we are working in the United States, we learn how to live in a sort of apartheid system, an economic apartheid, a social apartheid, and of course a racial apartheid. We are hidden, we are silent, we work.

The average lifespan of a farm worker in the United States is still only 49 years. That is what it takes to keep up the production that is required by the agricultural industry so that you can have your berries and fresh vegetables. And some of us die before that age. Antonio Zambrano was killed by the police in Pasco, Washington for throwing a rock out of his frustration at the poverty he was living in and the disrespect and treatment he and his family have been receiving for many, many years.

To us, ag policy means that pesticides are still being used. Ag policy to us means that the piece-rate wage is the legal, institutionalized wage theft process that almost every farm worker in this country must use in order to receive a paycheck. That is why our lifespan is 49 years of age: piece-rate wage system and pesticides. Stop and listen, we are the canaries in the mine. The agricultural industry is unleashing chemicals into the fields of California that are going to be used all over the country and it will come back to you, the consumer. Listen to us, the farm workers.

We make the road by walking. We don't know what that road will look like but we have to walk together and we have to live well as we're making that road. That means we all have to give our commitment. The road we walk together must lead to the table where you can sit with your family and eat your food, knowing your dinner on your plate is free and clear of all exploitation of humans and of Mother Earth.

Adapted from presentation at Food First 40th Anniversary Panel in 2015.



# Box 3

## Black lives matters

The food justice movement is a reflection of the rise in social and political resistance against structural racism. Contrary to mainstream claims of a “post-racial society,” an alarming rise of institutional violence against young African-Americans and people of color in the United States has accompanied the food, fuel and financial crises. Movements for justice and liberation like #BlackLivesMatter are making it impossible to ignore the problem of racism any longer—on the right and the left.

On August 8, progressive presidential candidate and Vermont senator Bernie Sanders appeared in Seattle to talk about social security and Medicare but was interrupted when two members of the local chapter of #BlackLivesMatter took the stage. August 9 marked the one-year anniversary of the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, at the hands of the police and the protesters were asking for four and a half minutes of silence in recognition of the four and a half hours the police kept Brown's lifeless body on a Ferguson street.

They criticized Sanders and other progressives for failing to tackle racism. Many people in the predominantly white crowd became angry with the protesters and demanded that they let the senator speak but Sanders left the stage. He later released a written statement in which he said he was “disappointed because on criminal justice reform and the need to fight racism there is no other candidate for president who will fight harder than me.”

Ever since the event took place, there has been a lot of discussion about whether or not the protest was positive for

#BlackLivesMatter. Some believe it was necessary in order to hold white progressives accountable for the issue of structural racism.

Others are confused as to why Sanders was targeted since he has always been a supporter of civil rights. This protest, however, was not just about Sanders: it was about all progressives failing to take on the fight against racism.

While Sanders may have been disappointed by the outcome that day, this experience will ultimately be valuable to him. It showed him what is important to the people, giving him the opportunity to address those concerns and gain support. #BlackLivesMatter is forcing progressives to have the uncomfortable conversation about racism and is pressuring political figures to take action. They are making it clear to candidates and to the public that we cannot move forward politically without addressing the violence of structural racism.

To read the full news story: <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/black-lives-matter-protesters-shut-down-bernie-sanders-rally/>

For the perspective of an indigenous man who was present at the event: <http://www.thestranger.com/blogs/slog/2015/08/13/22694043/guest-editorial-i-support-bernie-sanders-for-president-and-i-also-support-the-black-lives-matter-takeover-in-seattle>



## to read, listen, watch and share

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