

Security and Sustainability through Food Sovereignty:

There is no singular definition of food sovereignty, but despite its ambiguity, it may be the answer to all of our problems. Food and its production touches every aspect of daily life, from the quick breakfast on the way out the door to the elaborate holiday feasts we share each year. Food is central to every culture, the practices and traditions developed around its production, preparation and consumption was once the defining factor and common foundation for all civilizations.

With this understanding, it should be no surprise that food insecurity and alienation from the food production process is a universal underlying factor of the social and environmental woes in the United States today. Everything from community level violence to the unchecked damages of climate change can be traced back to issues of food justice.

Study after study links nutrient deficiencies in childhood to aggression, developmental delays, and impulsivity issues in adulthood. These factors create an undue vulnerability to criminal engagement and violence; children who experience food insecurity are twice as likely to exhibit impulsive behavior and intentionally injure others during their adolescence and adulthood. On a larger scale, in any given community a 1% increase in food insecurity translates to a 13% increase in violent crime. This correlation is a stronger predictor of violence than even income disparities.

But the impacts do not stop at criminal activity. In 2014, the federal government spent \$160 billion on health expenditures directly tied to food insecurity. 24% of all federal spending goes to the reactive treatment of food related disorders such diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease and depression. Poor diet now accounts for a higher mortality rate than smoking and high blood pressure combined.

Additionally, malnutrition is associated with: low birth weight, premature delivery, stunted growth, cognitive and developmental delays, asthma, anemia, anxiety, and impulsivity. The effects range from psychosocial dysfunction to inhibited academic performance. Opportunities to overcome childhood poverty is directly linked a child's academic achievement and social connectivity. Hunger is at the center of poverty's vicious cycle.

Beyond issues of crime, health and wealth, lie more insidious problems that no one escapes, regardless of socioeconomic status. Climate change due to greenhouse gas emissions is an immediate and palpable threat. Between 44% and 57% of all greenhouse gas emissions are created from the global food systems that we have become so reliant upon.

And finally, race based inequity. The ever present truth of institutionalized racism is rooted deeper in the American soil than the Constitution itself. Arable land was stolen from the indigenous and farmed by the enslaved. Generations of sacred horticultural knowledge converged from around the globe, solely to be appropriated for colonial gain. First stripped of their lands and traditions, later barred from the education and heritage in which lies self-determination, the indigenous and Black communities were forced into dependence on a flawed and insufficient social welfare system, for which they would be demonized and infantilized for using.

So many of the answers to the questions of social justice related to crime, health, income disparity, the environment, and even racial equity can all be traced back to food justice. Inherent to Food sovereignty is: Equitable access to healthy food, decommodification of nutrition, community and land connections, cultural restoration and the revitalization of communities through self-determination.

What is Food Sovereignty?

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.”

– Declaration of Nyéléni, the first global forum on food sovereignty, Mali, 2007

Food sovereignty is the foundation of an autonomous society based upon the values of reciprocity and the interconnectedness of *all* things. These circumstances are the fertile ground from which self-actualization springs forth.

What are the benefits?

- Equitable access to nutritious foods lower rates of violence on an interpersonal basis and at the community level
- Adequate nutrition during childhood significantly improves academic outcomes and long term economic mobility
- Healthy diets reduce the rates of anxiety, depression, cognitive and developmental delays, anemia, asthma, low birth weights, premature delivery, impulsivity and hyperactivity in children
- Diet related health issues account for a large portion adult disability and mortality rates, improved nutrition would decrease reactive government medical spending and lost productivity
- Traditional agricultural methods, practiced within localized economies would significantly lower carbon emissions and create carbon sinks, resulting in negative net emissions.
- Reconnecting people with the land fosters a relationship of respect and understanding that leads to land stewardship and individual wellness, which is essential for a sustainable short and long term future
- Localized food economies allow for joint decision making at all stages of food production and consumption enhancing the community connectivity, financial stability and over all wellness.
- Internally supported food infrastructure creates self-sustaining and highly resilient economies minimizing or eliminating the need for many social welfare programs
- Micro-economies foster fair compensation and livable wages, driving industrial growth and community revitalization
- Centralized food systems connect community members, creating natural healthy support networks and social safety nets, reducing the necessity for external support
- Connected, self sufficient communities are autonomous in nature allowing for culturally appropriate growth

Why is it important?

Food sovereignty allows communities to become the collective, reciprocal societies that were the core of existence for their earliest ancestors. Restoring the natural social structures of the past allows not only traditional cultures to flourish, it is an essential step toward community actualization. Cohorts who are not beholden to social welfare programs have the right of inherent self-determination, a pre-requisite to the development, preservation and expansion of any healthy and functional society. The people who live and are raised within self-sufficient communities are both physically and mentally healthier, more adaptable, and are better able to contribute toward problem solving on a global scale.

Pathways to Food Sovereignty

Decommodification of food

- Establish Free Gardens
 - Identify community gathering spaces and creative (guerilla) spaces that can support small scale and traditional agriculture
 - Churches, community associations, private land, tribal land, restaurant and retail green spaces etc
 - Develop sustainable support systems to ensure the perpetuity of the food sources
 - Identify established institutions for volunteer sourcing and networking
 - Secure reliable and ongoing financial support
 - Promote an independent future for each garden through community connections, engagement and training
 - Create growth models through acquisition of agricultural and food processing equipment
 - Traditional Ag: *Tilther, seed and mulch spreaders, hoes, rakes, shovels, wheel barrows etc*
 - Food preservations: *Pressure cookers, Freezers, dehydrators etc*
 - Seed keeping: *mason jars, seed screens, envelopes, etc*
 - Build community awareness and support through culturally appropriate avenues
 - Cultural arts exhibitions: concerts, artist markets,
 - Volunteer/education days coupled with BBQ's/picnics
 - Powwows and Cultural celebrations: green corn fest, Juneteenth, solstice,
 - Media outreach: 'zines, youtube channel, podcast, resources directories
- Initiate Free Markets, community frig's, food delivery networks, venue specific distribution plans
 - Identify overlap between geographic areas of need and areas with universal ease of access
 - food deserts
 - areas with high income discrepancies where support programs may not exist
 - Secure funding and ongoing support for the purchase and maintenance of equipment
 - Build upon already existing infrastructure
 - Find community organizations/businesses willing to host and support
 - Coordinate with Social Services, other social welfare networks
 - Collaborate with sister organizations to learn best practices

Stabilizing the future and growth of traditional Foodways

- Train communities in sustainable/traditional gardening methods and the importance of food sovereignty
 - Guerilla gardening, Creative and micro-space home gardening, gardens not grass initiatives
 - High density and companion planting
 - Seed Savings
 - Food preservation
- Reframe the approach to food preparation and nutrition
 - Interactive cooking demonstrations
 - Cultural education related to traditional foodways
 - Recipe Cards- coordinate food boxes
- Teach the Teacher programs
 - School Inservice events aimed at Agriculture, Social Sciences, Health Educators
 - Identify community leaders and offer training- ministers, youth leaders, community organizers
 - Develop adaptable curriculum for distribution to educational/leadership organizations
 - Ag Education is Eco Education- climate change, carbon sinks, carbon emissions

- Food Justice is Social Justice- climate impacts on marginalized populations, impacts of the industrialization of foodways on nutrition, environment and community
 - Economics of Food- Sustainable Ag is fiscally solvent, Cost-benefits of groceries vs. garden
- Develop educational materials for multilevel, multipurpose distribution
- Develop resource libraries (digital at first)

Connecting Community to Industry

- Form a task force for the purposes of
 - Identifying which commercial entities are present in our communities
 - What each company is extracting from the community
 - What each company is contributing to the community
 - What laws impact the relationship between community and company
 - Who are the invested parties or representatives from: community reps, advocacy groups, government and commercial entities
- Build connections between food justice advocates, community, government, and industries
- Establish mutually beneficial systems of reciprocity

Priorities and next steps???

- Additions, edits, comments or concerns with the above?
- Mission statement? Priorities?
- How will we be organized?
 - Independent nonprofit, sub organization, or other?
- What do we want to do this year? Next year? Three years from now?
- How much will it all cost?
- Where will funding come from and how will we ensure it is sustainable?
- What are the immediate goals? Measurable objectives?
- Is growth beyond the current region a long term goal?
- How will “staff” be compensated for their time?
- Who is staff?
- What “experts” do we need that we don’t already have?
 - current programming is centered on indigenous foodways, and other BIPOC food culture has not been included

Further Reading:

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/>

<https://thebarbecuelab.com/hunger-in-america/?amp>

<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america>

<https://www.ttuhub.net/2017/09/food-insecurity-how-does-hunger-affect-our-communities/>

<https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/opinion/columnists/2016/08/19/piquero-link-hunger-violence/89022948/>

https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3571&context=all_theses

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/food-prices-and-spending/#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20households%20in%20the,representing%207%20percent%20of%20income>

<https://grain.org/article/entries/5390-food-sovereignty-can-stop-climate-change-and-feed-us-all>

<https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov/hubs/southwest/news/tribal-food-sovereignty-and-climate-change-preparedness-tribal-agriculture>

<https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/food-sovereignty-can-advance-racial-equity-and-climate-resilience>

<https://www.nicoa.org/the-importance-of-food-sovereignty/>

<https://www.bia.gov/service/indigenous-tourism/why-food-sovereignty-matters>

[Food Sovereignty | USFSA \(usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org\)](https://www.usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/)