Some terms for thinking about food access and food justice

**Food justice movement:** a movement that believes all communities, regardless of race or income, can have both increased access to healthy food and the power to influence a food system that prioritizes environment and human needs over corporate profits. The food justice movement also stresses that the cultivation of food systems that are both environmentally sustainable and socially just requires addressing institutionalized racism and economic barriers to food access. *For example, communities of color and poor communities have time and again been denied access to the means of food production, and, due to both price and store location, often cannot access the diet advocated by the food movement. Through food justice activism, low-income communities and communities of color seek to create local food systems that meet their own food needs.*

**Food movement:** *(to be distinguished from the food justice movement)* generally refers to the movement primarily made up of white, middle to upper-class community members that focuses on healthy, locally-sourced foods and has historically focused on individual access, thereby failing to analyze how issues related to communities’ race and class status impact their inability to afford or locally access this food in their own neighborhoods.

**Food access:** individuals’ and/or communities’ ability to produce and consume healthy food

**Food desert:** an area with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly when an area is composed primarily of lower income neighborhoods and communities. *While small corner stores and ethnic grocers often abound in food deserts, fresh, nutritious food is rarely available from these grocers. They tend to stock less healthy, poorer quality foods that are high in sugars and saturated fats. Food also costs significantly more at these businesses than at corporate-owned supermarkets. A recent study of corner and ethnic groceries specifically in Richmond confirmed these findings locally.*

**Food security:** as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, food security means having access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.

**Food sovereignty:** often described as a more encompassing term in comparison to “food access,” food sovereignty refers to a community’s right to define its own food and agricultural systems. It calls for a greater distribution of power in terms of the management of food and environmental systems, and it claims food as a right, not a commodity. *According to Raj Patel, author of Stuffed and Starved, food sovereignty is “important not only because it has been authored by those most directly hurt by the way contemporary agriculture is set up, but also because it offers a profound agenda for change for everyone in that it aims to redress the abuse of the powerless by the powerful, wherever in the food system that abuse may happen.”*
**Food waste:** Food that is discarded due to contamination, spoiling, or otherwise left on our plates. *In 2010, the U.S. wasted 133 billion pounds of food, which accounted for 31% of the nation’s total food supply.* (See NPR’s “U.S. Lets 141 Trillion Calories of Food Go to Waste Each Year,” February 27, 2014)

**Foodways:** food practices, with a particular recognition of the ways in which food can become manifestations and symbols of cultural histories that inform individuals’ identities. *The food justice movement recognizes that social and economic constraints affect individuals’ and communities’ foodways. A common critique of the food movement (and work by people like Michael Pollan) is that it presumes foodways are individual choices that each person has the power to control.*

**Institutionalized racism:** moves beyond the idea that individuals consciously make biased decisions or judgments based on race and instead recognizes the many instances in which institutions such as government agencies, corporations, and the like adopt policies that exclude or target people of color either overtly or in their effects. *An example: the supermarket industry’s well-documented practice of charging lower prices in suburban versus urban areas, where urban consumers are much more likely to be people of color who have fewer options in terms of where to buy food.*

**Production of Hunger:** Some scholars emphasize how hunger is “produced” to emphasize that we live in a world of agricultural surplus (see food waste) and thus hunger is not a natural process but rather it is produced by unequal power relations and resource access. *Some critics of U.S. food security policy note that it sidesteps a structural analysis of hunger, arguing that it focuses instead on feeding hungry people rather than altering the structural problems that cause food insecurity.*

**Credits:**


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