FOOD JUSTICE: A PEOPLES MOVEMENT WHOSE TIME IS NOW

Who We Are
We are a group of twenty-two people from eleven states and sovereign Native lands whose ancestry touches every continent. We are a multicultural group including Navajo, Anishenabeg/Ojibwe, Choctaw, African-American, Loma, Persian, Indian-American, Sri Lankan, Lebanese, Jewish, Euro-American (of the Azores, Italy, Germany, Eastern Europe, Switzerland, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, and Scotland), Puerto Rican, Chicana/Chicano, Hispanic, Latino, and Mexican identities. We are women and men who grew up in the suburbs, in cities and in rural areas. Some of us are the first in our families to attend college. Some of us are from families were higher education is a legacy. We know poverty and affluence.

Our diverse stories embody and reflect the histories of inequity and oppression that have characterized colonization, globalization and marginalization of our communities. Our stories also affirm the power of local people and embody a variety of resilient spiritual practices, agrarian cultures and food traditions which we recognize and draw on as a source of wisdom, inspiration and a foundation from which to build a more socially just and equitable food system that can sustain us all.

Together we drank wild cota tea ripened in the summer sun of northern New Mexico, savored wild rice hand harvested from Minnesota lakes and roasted by Native Harvest, meditated on blueberries picked at Knoll Farm which overlooks the Mad River Valley of Vermont, and we welcomed Shabbat with nourishment from freshly baked, multi-grain Challah. These foods sustained our bodies, soothed our souls amidst the hard work of bridging differences, and connected us to the land and each other.

We came together from a love of people and the belief that every human being is entitled to live to their greatest potential. We represent different aspects of the food system including farmworkers, philanthropists, traditional growers, wild harvesters, restaurant workers, government agency representatives, academics, food-processing plant workers, community activists, local food system entrepreneurs and founders of food cooperatives, as well as those influencing corporate actors in the food system.

We come together to dialogue across our differences to bridge divides and share our stories with one another building greater understanding of the food system in its totality so that we can better envision what we wish to bring into being.

We recognize the centrality of our own agency and the importance of developing our capacity for multi-cultural competency so that internalized oppression, racism, and white and male privilege are actively resisted and do not fragment and weaken our movement. We are committed as multi-cultural people to protect and support one another to do our very best.

We believe that this movements identity rests in each of us, and will expand when we enable others to see themselves within this story. The term Food Justice can help us to build identity, solidarity, and convergence with those who share belief in principles of justice.

We offer this document as a framework to support the continued development of a Food Justice Movement. We offer it as a living document that we hope will be improved, refined, and added to as it is read by others.

We are committed to the following principles
That we are a part of history and must know the lessons of the past. This movement is rooted in historical struggle and builds upon social movements of the past and present.

That every human being has a fundamental right to healthy food and that we have a moral imperative to address the root causes of hunger and starvation.
That we must stop the exploitation of all people who labor in the food system including family farmers, those who work in the fields cultivating and harvesting, as well as those who process, prepare and serve our food.

That people have the right to migrate without criminalization and oppression. We recognize that our food system is dependent on migrant and immigrant labor. All food system workers, including non-citizens, deserve fair working conditions, and if they are undocumented they deserve a path toward legalizing their status.

That all forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, and capitalist exploitation, must be opposed as we work toward the liberation of all people.

That in order for people to feed themselves communities must protect their land and water. We recognize that the rights of people to sustainably plant land, use water, graze animals, hunt, gather, needs to be considered when assigning value to land and approving land uses.

That food is sacred, and cultural and spiritual traditions related to food should be honored. This means respecting ancient food and agricultural traditions, the indigenous knowledge embodied in those traditions, and the rights of indigenous and land-based peoples to continue farming, ranching, fishing, hunting, and gathering.

That many technologies, including genetic modification, violate the values of many peoples and cultures; raise unanswered questions around biodiversity, health and safety; and involve patenting and intellectual property relationships which need to be more carefully scrutinized before they are applied in our food system in ways that result in oppression and exploitation.

That a just food system should resist and prevent life forms from being valued solely as commodities. Valuing land, water and food resources as commodities reduces their importance, hides their vital inter-connectedness with other living systems and encourages short-sighted profiteering.

That all forms of violence, including violence against people, domestic animals, and nature, should be ended.

That agricultural systems free of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers toxic or harmful to farmworkers, consumers, and the environment are more sustainable. The transition away from toxic chemical-based agriculture into more sustainable practices should be promoted by public policies.

That ethical business practices along all points in the food system should be promoted with incentives and rewards through public policy and the marketplace. And, that unethical business practices should be sanctioned through consumer campaigns and a better enforced regulatory framework.

That a people-centered movement can embody these principles while upholding human dignity and equity. We are committed to being a social movement which does not require its activists to sacrifice their economic well-being, health care, or personal safety for the greater good. We are the greater good.

That working together in a movement is challenging and requires commitment and continuous learning.

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Approaches
The concept of Food Justice is what brings us together. Our work is about protecting and supporting one another to do our very best in working toward food justice. This is a peoples movement that has no single organization holding the center. We work through collaboration based on trust, respect, appreciation, and dialogue that is reciprocal. We work through collective leadership that brings together people working in all aspects of the food system. We aspire to create leadership that is a reflection of all oppressed people, whoever they may be. We agree to bring forward a new generation of politicized leaders of color and other underprivileged people. We welcome those with power and privilege to join with us in transforming the food system into a just food system.

Our movement will analyze structures of exploitation and oppression in order to avoid reproducing them and in order to dismantle them. We will work to transform relations of power and privilege to become relations of equality, and we commit to do that by modeling it ourselves. This movement will create and support models of ethical enterprises and organizations piloting what equity looks like so we can feel, see and taste it. We acknowledge the need to create business models that benefit everyone equitably. We will work toward a shift in the structure of ownership that supports an equal distribution of resources. We agree to summon the courage to speak critically of all systems that oppress, including capitalism.

We will value and utilize all forms of knowledge to increase our understanding of a just food system. We are willing to build on the long history of social movements, in order to understand what they accomplished and how, and who was left behind. Movements to consider include the anti-slavery, anti-colonialism, civil rights, and farmworkers movements. Equally important to this movement is the acknowledgement that the foundation of modern agriculture in this country was built by the oppressed, through removal, displacement, slavery, appropriation of the commons, and exploitation.

We need to increase understanding of the systems we seek to change through analysis, shared learning, stories, and shared action. We understand that policy plays a major role in the food system. Therefore we are seeking political power to bring about policy change and to hold those in power accountable to our social change agenda.

We are committed to self-awareness and to recognizing our own capacity to reproduce the very problems we are opposing now. We will seek to create equitable relations in all of our work, doing our best to not reproduce relations of exploitation and oppression. We agree to never deny an individuals participation or voice, especially on the part of those most affected by injustice. We agree to not make assumptions about people and to respect a diversity of perspectives. We recognize the importance of maintaining balance when it comes to our own mind, body, and spirit and we support each other in maintaining that balance.

We welcome into our movement those with power and privilege who are willing to work for food justice as we have outlined it in this document. We agree to deepen our dialogue with mutual acknowledgement of and respect for diversity.