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Food Justice

Our current industrial-based food system does not adequately give equal access to healthy, nourishing food and many do not have access to food at all. However, Jewish tradition, firmly rooted in texts from the Torah, sees a direct connection between social justice, agriculture, and religious obligations. This section will explore the issues of food justice and explain why it is important that as a Jewish community we not only work on spreading awareness, but that we do something to help create a just and sustainable food system for everyone.

What is Food Justice and Why Does it Matter?

Food justice is communities exercising their right to grow, sell, and eat healthy food. Healthy food is fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally-appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land, workers, and animals. Practicing food justice leads to a strong local food system, self-reliant communities, and a healthy environment.

Until recently “food security” has been a more common term used to describe a similar, if not broader, area of social concern. Government bureaucrats and international non-governmental-organizations have been using the term “food security” to call attention to a whole host of agriculture and hunger related issues. Activists have also used it to focus on creating community-based ways of producing food in an affordable, sustainable, and environmentally-friendly manner. Along the way they have sought to create local jobs, promote good health, and stress the importance of small, local farmers.

With the use of the term “food justice” this activism hasn’t changed so much as it has taken on fresh new political energy. In an increasing number of grassroots efforts in New York, local people are re-imagining their collective relationship to food. Food justice starts from the conviction that access to healthy food is a human rights issue—it goes beyond advocacy and direct service. Food justice calls for organized responses to food security problems—responses that are locally driven and owned.

Food Bank Cooking Demo

Eating fresh, organic produce through a CSA is a blessing – but the blessing of healthy, sustainable food is not equally accessible to everyone. The Hazon CSA in Elkins Park, PA, held two separate cooking classes at the Stiffel Center in South Philadelphia, which is part of Philadelphia’s Mitzvah Food Pantry network. Approximately 25 participants attended each class. Each class was focused around preparing two or three different recipes and incorporated health and nutrition information about the vegetables being prepared. The program allowed CSA members to share some of their passion for healthy, organic food with members of a low-income community.

HOW YOUR INSTITUTION CAN GET INVOLVED IN FOOD JUSTICE:

- **Host a gleaning trip on a local farm.** Go to the farm towards the end of harvest season and collect the excess produce. Make arrangements to donate the food to a local food pantry or soup kitchen. Tie in some learning about agriculture and tzedekah.
- **Link up with a local shelter or food bank to donate your excess food.** Your partnership could include donating food, organizing a field trip for members of your community to volunteer at the shelter, or partnering on events (see the “Food Bank Cooking Demo” sidebar).
- **Start a Hazon CSA.** Implement flexible payment options to allow people of all income levels to participate.
- **Start a Peah Garden.** Peah is the biblical commandment of leaving the crops in the “corners of your field” for the poor. Create a garden where you use some or all of the space to grow solely for the purpose of donating to community members who do not have access to healthy, nutritious produce.
- Screen a movie such as **Food Stamped** and discuss ways that your community can come together and make a difference.

Gleaning in Milwaukee

“I coordinate the Surplus Garden Harvest project of Tikkun Ha-Ir of Milwaukee. This project started three years ago as a way to encourage gardeners to donate their surplus garden bounty to meal sites and food pantries. In the first year, the donations were minimal. In the second year, we donated 1,000 pounds of fresh produce during the course of the Midwest gardening season (Produce came primarily from unclaimed CSA boxes). We now encourage donations from home gardens, the Jewish Community Garden (located on the grounds of our local JCC), CSA boxes, and also from local farms with surplus edible, but not salable, produce. The latter is providing the majority of the donations so far this year – at just halfway into the growing season, we are at 1,060 pounds and are on track to triple what we donated last year.”

- Pam Frydman-Roza

Food Justice Organizations

- **Just Food** is a NY-based non-profit organization that has been the leader in connecting local farms to NYC neighborhoods and communities since 1995. Their food justice program increases awareness and action around food and farm issues and advances policies for a thriving local food system.
- **Growing Power** is a national non-profit organization and land trust that supports people from diverse backgrounds and the environments in which they live by helping to provide equal access to healthy, high-quality, safe, and affordable food for people in all communities. Growing Power implements this mission by providing hands-on training, on-the-ground demonstration, outreach, and technical assistance through the development of Community Food Systems that help people grow, process, market, and distribute food in a sustainable manner.
- **Second Harvest** is the nation's leading domestic hunger-relief charity. Its mission is to feed America's hungry through a nationwide network of member food banks and engage our country in the fight to end hunger.
- **Ample Harvest** diminishes hunger in America by helping backyard gardeners share their excess garden produce with neighborhood food pantries.
- **People's Grocery** is a community-based organization in West Oakland, CA that develops creative solutions to the health problems in our community that stem from a lack of access to and knowledge about healthy, fresh foods. Its mission is to build a local food system that improves the health and economy of the West Oakland community.
- **Community Food Security Coalition** is a non-profit organization dedicated to building strong, sustainable, local, and regional food systems that ensure access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food for all people at all times. The coalition seeks to develop self-reliance among all communities in obtaining their food and to create a system of growing, manufacturing, processing, making available, and selling food that is regionally based and grounded in the principles of justice, democracy, and sustainability.

Support Systems

Members of your community may be eligible for government support from various food and nutrition programs. Make sure your institution has information available about these programs. You can request brochures at <http://snap.ntis.gov/>.

- **SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)** used to be known as the Food Stamp Program, and is a Federal assistance program that provides low and no-income families with money with which to buy food.
- **WIC (Women, Infants, and Children)** is a federal assistance program for providing healthcare and nutrition for low-income pregnant/breastfeeding women, infants, and children under the age of five.
- **SNFMP (Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program)** is a Federal program which gives grants to governments in order to provide low-income seniors with coupons that can be exchanged for certain foods (such as fruits, vegetables, honey, and fresh-cut herbs) at farmers' markets, roadside stands, and CSAs.

Second Helpings

For the past six years, about 100 congregants from Temple Sinai in Atlanta, GA go to grocery stores, schools, and restaurants to pick up perishable food that is either almost expired or prepared and ready for freezing. They then deliver it to 14 different community agencies. To date, they have picked up over two million pounds of food which previously would have been discarded, and thousands of needy individuals and families have been fed.

Food Justice, Then and Now

In 2004, Hazon launched the first Community Supported Agriculture project in the Jewish community. The preceding winter, we talked about food charity and *peah* at our Beit Midrash, a 12-weeks series on “How & What Should a Jew Eat?” We were new to the idea of CSA, and so we asked: if we are no longer farmers with fields where we could leave gleanings for the ‘poor, widow, and orphan,’ then what is our responsibility to food charity, as Jews and as twenty-first century city-folk?

Dr. Phyllis Bieri said, “Well, with a CSA, there are always leftovers!” We realized that, indeed, it was inevitable that some members would not pick up their share every

week, and that therefore, built into the system of the Hazon Community Supported Agriculture Project (which met a series of other contemporary food issue concerns, being fresh, local, mostly organic, minimally-packaged, etc.) was also a mechanism that enabled us to “observe *peah* and *shikecha*” as well. It made us even more excited to begin the CSA project at Anshe Chesed that summer. The leftovers that year were taken every week to a soup kitchen on the Upper West Side.

Hazon’s CSA program has since grown to over fifty sites in the US, Canada, and Israel. In 2011, we estimate that this meant over 35,000 lbs of leftover produce was donated to emergency food providers.

Shikhecha: Leaving sheaves

¹⁹ When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the orphan, and the widow — in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings.

²⁰ When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; that shall go to the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. ²¹ When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. ²² Always remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore do I command you to do this thing.

– Deuteronomy 24:19-22

Peah: The corners of your field

⁹ When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest.

¹⁰ You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Lord am your God.

– Leviticus 19:9-10

כי תקצר קצירך בשדה ושכחת עמר בשדה
לא תשוב לקחתו לגר ליתום ולאלמנה
יהיה: למען יברך יהוה אלהיך בכל
מעשה ידיך.

כי תחבט זיתך לא תפאר אחריו: לגר
ליתום ולאלמנה יהיה. כי תבצר פרמך
לא תעולל אחריו: לגר ליתום ולאלמנה
יהיה. וזכרת כי עבד היית בארץ מצרים;
על בן אנכי מצוך לעשות את הדבר הזה.

ובקצרכם את קציר ארצכם לא תכלה
פאת שדה לקצר; ולקט קצירך לא תלקט.
וכרמך לא תעולל ופרט פרמך לא תלקט:
לעני ולגר תעזב אתם אני יהוה אלהיכם.