

**EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY**

GOOD FOOD + GOOD JOBS FOR ALL

**Challenges and Opportunities
to Advance Racial and Economic
Equity in the Food System**

Yvonne Yen Liu • July 2012 • arc.org/foodjustice



APPLIED RESEARCH CENTER

Racial Justice Through Media, Research and Activism

Publisher of

COLORLINES®.com

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our society could stand to benefit from greater collaboration between the good food and good jobs movements. Unfortunately, the movements largely operate parallel to each other, rarely stepping outside their comfort zones to engage the other. The majority of good food advocates are wary of collaborating with the labor movement for fear of diluting their mission. Similarly, proponents of good jobs typically focus solely on serving the interests of workers and are generally uninterested in tackling the structural problems in industrial agriculture and the production of food.

Good Food and Good Jobs, Defined

Good food is the alternative food and agriculture movement, which Julie Guthman described in *Weighing In* as “institutions and practices that bring small-scale farmers, artisan food producers, and restaurant chefs together with consumers for the market exchange of what is characterized as fresh, local, seasonal, organic, and craft-produced food.”¹ She added, “The idea is that by more closely linking producers and consumers the environmental impacts of farming will be reduced and consumers will have access to a healthier and more affordable food supply. Advocates and activists then focus on enacting policies that will encourage the growth of more of these institutions in so-called food deserts and educating people about the importance of healthy, sustainably grown food.”²

Good jobs is the movement to win dignity and respect for workers, regardless of their occupation or identity. Good jobs pay living wages, provide benefits such as paid sick days and family leave, and offer career pathways for a less skilled worker to move up into a higher skilled position. Good jobs also provide a safe work environment and adequate training for employees to carry out their responsibilities without injury. Lastly, a good job offers workers the opportunity to organize, if they wish, into a collective bargaining unit without fear of employer retaliation.

Food deserts: The USDA defines a “food desert” as a “low-income census tract where a substantial number or share of residents has low access to a supermarket or large grocery store.”⁶ A review of studies by PolicyLink discovered that only 8% of Blacks live in a census tract with a supermarket, compared to 31% of whites.⁷

Wage and hour violations: Most jobs in the food chain pay poverty wages for long hours. 86% of food workers surveyed by the Food Chain Workers Alliance earn poverty wages; only 13.5% make a living wage.⁸ Low wages cuts across the food chain, but hurts workers of color harder. Almost one out of every four Asian food workers earns a subminimum wage.⁹ 30% of indigenous workers make less than minimum wage and close to a quarter of Latino and over 20% of Black food workers earn subminimum

KEY QUESTIONS

The Applied Research Center (ARC) sought to answer three key questions through this report:

- 1 Who is most impacted by inequities in the food system?
- 2 What are the challenges for food and labor in engaging across movements?
- 3 What opportunities help to bridge the divide and advance both good food and good jobs agendas?

FOOD INEQUITIES BY RACE

When we look at who is most negatively impacted by the food and economic system, we find that it is disproportionately low-income people and people of color (see *Table 1: Food Inequities by Race*).

Obesity: 111 million people in the U.S. are classified as obese by the CDC, that’s over a third of all adults and almost 20% of children and adolescents.³ Obesity rates have dramatically increased in the past 20 years, particularly in regions in the South, which had almost 30% prevalence of obesity.⁴ Obesity is not experienced equally across race. Blacks experience the highest rate of obesity, more than 35%, with indigenous peoples following at 30%. Close to 30% of Latinos are also classified as obese.

Food security: 40 million households in this country suffer from lack of access to adequate food, which the USDA defines as “food insecurity.”⁵ This impacts people of color disproportionately. About 10% of Black and 10% Latino families experience food insecurity, three times the rate for white households.

wages.¹⁰ 40% of food workers labored for more than 40 hours a week. More than half of Latino workers worked more than 40 hours a week.¹¹ Close to a half of indigenous workers did the same, as did more than 42% of Asian food workers.

Lack of benefits: An overwhelming majority of food chain workers don't have benefits from their employers. 79% don't have paid sick days and more than half have labored when ill.¹² 83% didn't receive health insurance coverage from their employer and 58% don't have any kind of coverage, at all.¹³ Black and Latino workers disproportionately lack health insurance, (59%), and more than 85% of indigenous food workers don't have coverage.

TABLE 1: FOOD INEQUITIES BY RACE

INEQUITY	WHITE	BLACK	LATINO	ASIAN*	AMERICAN INDIAN
GENERAL POPULATION					
RATE OF OBESITY	23.5	35.7	28.7	8.1	30.4
FOOD INSECURITY	7.5	9.5	10.4	5.3	UNAVAILABLE
FOOD WORKERS					
SUBMINIMUM WAGE	13.5	21.0	24.4	37.5	28.6
NO HEALTH INSURANCE	54.1	59.0	59.0	50.0	85.7
NO PAID SICK DAYS	83.3	75.3	79.8	90.0	92.9
WORKED OVER 40 HOURS/WEEK	28.9	26.6	50.6	42.1	49.5

* The government data available on Asian Americans likely masks wide variations of experiences across nations of origin and other backgrounds.

Sources: Obesity (2007-08) - US Department of Health and Human Services, and Centers for Disease Control; Household Food Insecurity (2009) - Economic Research Service, USDA; Food Workers (2012) - Food Chain Workers Alliance

RACIAL INEQUITY IN THE FOOD ECONOMY

“We need a more diversified food system, one not controlled by monopoly capital or big corporations. The powers of monopolies need to be dismantled in order for corporations to find their social role. They don't play a good social role, currently. They aren't self-policing.”
—Good food advocate

Economic power in the food system is consolidated in a few corporate hands: food and agricultural companies with annual revenues over \$1 billion. The same is true for the organic industry; General Mill purchased Cascadian farm and Muir Glen in 1999, for example, and Dean Food bought Horizon Organic Milk in 2004.¹⁴

The Color of Food report, which ARC released in 2011, also found that the ownership of capital in the food chain is primarily white and male.¹⁵ Whites also dominate high-wage jobs in the food system. Occupations such as chief executives and restaurant managers enjoy higher wages than the rank and file. The median income for management was \$40,544, more than double the \$20,608 median income of the rank and file. Almost half of all white men who worked in the food chain were employed as managers. A quarter of all white women performed managerial roles. Across the entire food system, three out of every four managers were white.

Workers of color populated rank-and-file positions at a higher rate than management positions. 44% of rank-and-file workers were people of color, while only 26% of managers and only 15% of managers were people of color. When gender is considered, the disparities are even more striking. Latina women make up less than 5% of all managers in the food chain, while Asians and Blacks are 3% or less.

We excluded farmers and ranchers from our analysis. However, the USDA has historically discriminated against subsidizing land ownership and loans for farmers of color. The U.S. government spends billions each year subsidizing farm operations. Yet Black farmers receive only one-third to one-sixth of the benefits that other farmers receive, according to the National Black Farmers Association.¹⁶ In 2010, the federal government agreed to settle claims with Black and indigenous farmers, paying out almost \$5 billion to settle longstanding claims of discrimination.¹⁷

CHALLENGES FOR GOOD FOOD AND GOOD JOBS

“Part of doing this work is thinking systemically. How do you do that? By engaging in questions of how the food system is operating as a whole. How does it play out for our food workers? What are the root causes? You begin to see the huge organizing opportunities that are there when you lift up these intersections and place them at the center of our work.”

—Worker center organizer

An effective response to the inequities of the food system requires analysis and action that both acknowledge and address the economics and racial composition of the power elite and those most impacted. Generally, such strategy was lacking in both the good food and good jobs movements. Both worlds focus on their self-interests, without a broader vision of how race, class and gender are interconnected in the food chain for both producers and consumers.

The good food movement tries to address three areas: health, environmentalism, and access. However, the field is beset with the logic of individualism, where people are made personally responsible for choosing their food, ignoring the myriad structural factors that shape that choice. According to this limited model, problems such as obesity and hunger arise when individuals are “bad consumers,” because they choose to eat unhealthy, fast food or live a sedentary lifestyle. In our view, the solution is not to focus on creative alternatives for small segments of the population, but to think on a broader scale, to acknowledge complexities and unintended consequences, and instigate structural changes.

Challenges for Good Food:

- Expand focus on individual consumer and personal responsibility to solutions that make structural changes for the most impacted groups
- Widen alternatives or niches to encompass the most impacted
- Examine the outcomes (even if unintended) of policies and practices on those most impacted in the food system

While the good food field suffers from a myopic focus on the individual consumer, blind to the political economy that supports the consumer as an income-earner, labor doesn't have a unified vision, either, for the most part. The trade union movement has historically excluded many workers in the food chain, whether because food workers were excluded from labor law or were undocumented immigrants. Unions often have short-term goals—e.g., winning a campaign or adding new members—and tend not to focus on the bigger picture. In order to survive a global economy that has transitioned from industrial manufacturing to service, trade unions have to reimagine their work and their relationship to good food.

Challenges for Good Jobs:

- Build coalitions with community stakeholders
- Develop tools, training, and networking opportunities for leadership and rank and file to learn about good food
- Invest in innovative solutions to win dignity and respect for workers that are grounded in the information— and service-based economy

OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE GOOD FOOD AND GOOD JOBS

Despite the challenges that prevent food and labor groups from recognizing shared self-interests, there are examples that advance good food and good jobs. We profile five opportunities and identify how it serves the interests of good food and good jobs, and which food sector is addressed (see Table 2: Opportunities to Advance Good Food and Good Jobs).

TABLE 2: OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE GOOD FOOD AND GOOD JOBS

OPPORTUNITY	GOOD FOOD	GOOD JOBS	FOOD SECTOR
Liquor Licenses	Enforce health and food safety rules in restaurants and convenience stores that sell liquor	Incentivize high road labor practices for employers through granting or renewing liquor licenses	Service Retail
Manufacturing Subsidies	Encourage small and medium sized food manufacturers producing trendy ethnic cuisine	Subsidize employers who don't violate labor law and who sign onto a code of conduct	Processing Distribution
Procurement Policies	Purchase local and sustainable food for state and national government	Require contractors to embrace high road labor standards in order to win public contracts	Production Processing
Retail Subsidies	Expand healthy and organic food availability in low-income communities of color	Mandate that community food markets have high bar labor standards or contribute to community wealth	Retail
Community Benefits Agreements	Expand healthy and organic food availability in low-income communities of color	Mandate that community food markets have high bar labor standards or contribute to community wealth	Retail

Three overarching ideas inform these five opportunities:

- Food safety linked to worker safety
- Public monies subject to transparency and accountability
- Consumer interest in good food linked to good labor practices

FOOD JUSTICE, ECONOMIC JUSTICE, RACIAL JUSTICE

“As people look forward to a long-term agenda, there are so many potential fractures, such as anti-hunger concerns versus food justice. The people who are most hurt are the ones that can transform the food system. How can we connect these communities and put them at the center of the movement?”—Good food advocate

A divide between the struggle for good food and good jobs is an issue of racial and economic justice, because it sharpens socioeconomic disparities for communities of color. Being separated in issue silos also serves the interests of the food and agricultural corporations operated by a minority of white men who dominate both domestic and global markets, thus creating the conditions for these disparities across the world.

There is, however, great overlap between the desire for communities to be sustained by good food and the need for good jobs. In general, the good food movement is interested in healthy and fresh food that is locally produced and distributed and available to all, regardless of race or economic circumstance. Labor, on the other hand, wants dignity and respect for all workers, in the form of family-sustaining wages and benefits, healthy and safe working conditions, and career pathways.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We have four recommendations on how good food and good jobs can build a just and equitable world, together:

1. Pursue intersectional analysis and foster the leadership of those most impacted

Because race, class and gender are so interlinked in the food system, any attempt to address both good food and good jobs needs to have an intersectional analysis and understanding of who is most impacted in terms of health and livelihoods. The disparities that low-income communities of color face must be explicitly considered when pursuing any kind of change agenda.

In addition, those who are most impacted, must be in the leadership of identifying the problems and acting on the solutions. Without authentic engagement and leadership development of those most impacted, good food and good jobs efforts run the risks of replicating systemic inequities.

2. Create alternatives while challenging the dominant food and economic system

Both good food and good jobs efforts are creating alternatives to the dominant food and economic system. For example, many food advocates are converting their front lawns into edible gardens, where fruit and vegetables are grown to feed their families. In western Massachusetts, community-labor organizers are creating community markets that will help to grow an alternative economy. However, there are 40 million food insecure, and the 20 million workers in the food chain. In order to truly change the conditions for all of these communities, niche solutions must be scaled to have maximum impact.

3. Build multiracial and multi-interest coalitions

Our survey found that multiracial organizations, be they food- or labor-focused, were more likely to be engaged in collaborative projects than monoracial organizations. Also, the success factor of each example in our opportunities section depended on how diverse a coalition was in terms of race and class composition and stakeholder representation. To win good food and good jobs requires broad-based alliances that locate the overlap between good food and labor and promote both.

4. Conduct more research on frames and develop resources to create tools and training

Our initial results from the survey found that healthy communities is a bridging frame that appealed to both good food and good jobs advocates. More research, however, needs to be done among various stakeholders (such as consumers, employers, workers and public health professionals) as to successful frames that integrate an intersectional analysis and promote leadership of those most impacted. Interviews with good food and labor advocates also revealed grave misunderstandings or knowledge gaps in their complementary worlds. Advocates responded that tools and trainings that can be used among leadership and constituents to explain good food to labor or good jobs to good food advocates would be helpful.

METHODS

Our research methods included a comprehensive literature review, a survey answered by over 180 respondents and in-depth interviews with more than 30 leaders in the good food and good jobs movements.

Although we recognize that the food system sprawls across the globe, we limited the landscape for our inquiry to the more manageable scope of the U.S. Therefore, we concerned ourselves with the history, the players and the activities of the respective food and labor movements in this country.

Because innovation can come from different levels (community, regional, state or national), we were open to any scale of an opportunity that we might find. Our primary criteria was that it would improve the quality of food for low-income people of color and guarantee sustainable jobs with career pathways for the workers, particularly those of color, in the food chain. Our secondary requirement was that the opportunity be shaped and implemented by the public sector, instead of relying on private or market-based self-regulation. We focused on the public sector, because the current inequities have been shaped by corporate consolidation.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Guthman, J. (2011). *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. pp. 3.
- 2 Julie Guthman, personal communication, 6/29/2012.
- 3 National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (4/27/2012). *Overweight and Obesity*. Retrieved 6/29/2012, from: <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/facts.html>
- 4 National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (4/27/2012). *Adult Obesity*. Retrieved 6/29/2012, from: <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html>
- 5 USDA. (6/4/2012). *Food Security in the U.S.: Definitions of Food Security*. Retrieved 6/29/2012, from: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx>
- 6 USDA. (6/11/2012). *Food Desert Locator: Documentation*. Retrieved 6/29/2012, from: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-desert-locator/documentation.aspx>
- 7 Treuhaft, S., & Karpyn, A. (3/15/2010). *The Grocery Gap: Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters*. PolicyLink. Retrieved 6/30/2012, from: http://www.policylink.org/site/c.klXLbMNJrE/b.5860321/k.A5BD/The_Grocery_Gap.htm#
- 8 Food Chain Workers Alliance. (6/2012). *The Hands that Feed Us: Challenges and Opportunities for Workers Along the Food Chain*. Retrieved 7/5/2012, from: <http://foodchainworkers.org/?p=1973>
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Howard, P.H. (2009). *Consolidation in the North American Organic Food Processing Sector, 1997 to 2007*. *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*. Vol. 16, No. 1, 13-30.
- 15 Yen Liu, Y., & Apollon, D. (2/2011). *The Color of Food*. Applied Research Center. Retrieved 7/7/2012, from: <http://arc.org/foodjustice>
- 16 Hoffman, J. (1/29/2009). *Farm Subsidies Overwhelmingly Support White Farmers*. Colorlines. Retrieved 7/1/2012, from: http://colorlines.com/archives/2009/01/farm_subsidies_overwhelmingly_support_white_farmers.html
- 17 King, J. (11/23/2010). *Senate Finally Votes to Pay Black and Native Farmers*. Colorlines. Retrieved 7/1/2012, from: http://colorlines.com/archives/2010/11/senate_finally_pays_black_and_native_farmers_34_billion_settlement.html

Author: Yvonne Yen Liu

Date: July 2012

Research Intern: Julia Sebastian

Research Director: Dominique Apollon

Designer: Stefanie Liang

Executive Director: Rinku Sen

Copyright 2012.
Applied Research Center
900 Alice Street, Suite 400, Oakland, CA 94607 | 510.653.3415
32 Broadway, Suite 1801, New York, NY 10004 | 212.513.7925
arc.org/foodjustice

We are grateful to the Rockefeller Foundation for their generous support, and for the wisdom and advice shared by the following: Brahm Ahmadi, Alison Hope Alkon, Chris Benner, Chris Bohner, Annette Bernhardt, Julie Guthman, Nikki Henderson, Eric Holt-Gimenez, Saru Jayaraman, Navina Khanna, Joann Lo, Steven Pitts, Jessica Powers, Gary Ruskin and Chris Tilly. The final analysis and recommendations, however, can be attributed to ARC alone.