

Florence “Sustainability of Well-Being International Forum”. 2015: Food for Sustainability and not just food, FlorenceSWIF2015

Food justice and sustainability: a new revolution

Patrizia Longo*

Saint Mary's College of California, Department of Politics, 1928 St Mary's Road, Moraga, Ca 94556, USA

Abstract

Urban agriculture has become one of the fastest growing types of agriculture in the United States. Establishing more localized food systems, with the aim of achieving social justice goals, has become an important strategy for developing sustainable urban food systems that try to alleviate food insecurity. Two main approaches address food security: the environmental approach seeks to establish a sustainable food system, and the social justice approach aims to eliminate poverty. These two approaches correspond to the two main dimensions of food security: the production and supply of an adequate quality and quantity of food, and the ability of people to access food.

I will document the history of the Urban Farmers, a grassroots organization in Lafayette, California, which endeavoured to address both issues of poverty and sustainability in a community-development approach to food security. Its project emphasizes making the food system local and fostering the development of community.

© 2016 The Authors. Published by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of Fondazione Simone Cesaretti

Keywords: Urban Farmers; community-development; right to food; food security; sustainability; social justice

1. Food security: two approaches

While it seems that there is an endless supply of food in United States, many people find themselves lacking access to food, particularly healthy food, since buying fresh, organic produce is beyond the reach of many. Food security eludes millions of Americans who suffer chronic under-consumption of adequate nutrients. Hamm and Bellows describe food security as being achieved when all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice (2003,

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: plongo57@gmail.com

37).

There are two main approaches that address food security: the environmental approach seeks to establish a sustainable food system, and the social justice approach aims to eliminate poverty. These two approaches correspond to the two main dimensions of food security: the production and supply of an adequate quality and quantity of food, and the ability of people to access food.

The sustainable-food-systems approach to food security has roots in the political and economic critique of the contemporary food system and in the environmental movement. From the political and economic perspective, corporate control of the food system and the commodification of food are the predominant threats to food security (Freidmann 1993, 216). The environmental perspective strengthened the food-system critique by showing that environmental degradation poses imminent threats to human living standards and well-being (Buttel 1993). According to the environmental perspective, the capitalistic food system completely disregards its environmental and human costs and is thus unsustainable.

When food is produced through an industrial system and distributed through a global supply chain, the inputs into food production, processing, and shipping generate enormous environmental stresses that cause pollution of the land, air, rivers, and streams and place health burdens on farm workers and other food producers. Long distance transport means emissions from trucks, ships, airplanes, and rail engines. The social justice approach extends the environmental view towards food issues by providing a systems approach. It links loss of farmland to the pressures of urban sprawl and abandonment of inner-city areas.

The social justice approach focuses on the persistence of people dropping in and out of hunger, even as we experience an obesity crisis, including obesity among the hungry. Our emergency food system, portrayed as the primary provider for those experiencing hunger, is incapable of meeting the high demand for food, which has only increased in the past three decades. Thus the anti-poverty, or social justice, approach to food security starts from the premise that the United States has an adequate food supply and food insecurity results from people's lack of access to food. In other words, poor people lack money to buy healthy, fresh, nutritious food. It is therefore crucial to separate food security from the struggle for income security. When food exists primarily within the marketplace, food insecurity is directly related to lack of income. Thus we are confronted with the absurdity of continued food insecurity in a wealthy world: the food is there but is not accessible to many who need it.

Establishing more localized food systems, with the aim of achieving social justice goals, is an important strategy for developing sustainable urban food systems. Hamm and Baron propose that a sustainable food system, among other things, "incorporate social justice issues into a more localized system; alleviate constraints on people's access to adequate, nutritious food; develop the economic capacity of local people to purchase food" (Hamm and Baron 1999, 55).

The environmentalist Paul Hawken writes that "the environmental movement is critical to our survival. Our house is literally burning, and it is only logical that environmentalists expect the social justice movement to get on the environmental bus. But is is the other way around; the only way we are going to put out the fire is to get on the social justice bus and heal our wounds, because, in the end, there is only one bus" (Hawken 2007, 190).

2. Case Study: The Urban Farmers

The Urban Farmers in Lafayette, California is a grassroots organization which attempts to address both issues of social justice and sustainability through a community-development approach to food security. Its goal is to make the food system local and to foster the development of community.

Lafayette, a former farming area, spans 15 miles, has a low population density with plenty of unused land and yard space, and a Mediterranean climate perfect for growing food. Even so, virtually all of the fruit and vegetables that Lafayette residents currently consume come from farms outside of Contra Costa County, and thus must be packaged, refrigerated, preserved, and transported to Lafayette. Therefore, one of the initial goals of the Urban Farmers was to lessen the environmental, health, and social impacts of this process by providing healthy, local food to people in the community. The goal of growing food locally was to produce "zero mile food" (sustainable food), but this method did not just reduce or eliminate the environmental costs of transportation. It also eliminated the packaging, pesticides (herbicides and insecticides) and monocultures used in the majority of the food industry that cause harm to the environment and, potentially, consumers' health. Additionally, the social impacts of current food

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4492559>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4492559>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)