

Agriculture: Democratizing our Food System

C&E SOC. 140: Introduction to Community & Environmental Sociology

Shia Aaron Lloyd Fisher

University of Wisconsin, Madison

25 June 2021

Unchecked capitalist food supply chains are the basis for the exploitation of entire populations. To explore this deeper it is important to recognize that populations around the globe have become the victim of racial attacks in the food system network through unfair work conditions or colonization for instance. In the latter example, indigenous peoples have experienced an all-out genocide as colonizers systematically destroy the biodiversity plant life natural to their forest's ecosystem to grow the most viable and high yielding crops (Vandana, S., 2015). This act simultaneously wipes out the native people's traditions, access to the land, and key sources of nutrients. The forced assimilation causes the culture of the population to disappear as those families struggle to provide for their children independently, and instead buy from the capitalistic system that despoiled their ancestral inheritances (Norgaard, K. M., Reed, R., & Van Horn, C., 2011).

The United States has a history of exploitation and capitalism as well as trying to find resolutions to those issues within its food systems. One example of such a food system was captured by PBS Iowa as a rural town in Nebraska USA finds creative solutions to keeping a local grocery store option available. This is a demonstration of food democratization. By finding grant opportunities, the local store was built, and through volunteer work and a student work study program, the store is maintained. This allows the town to keep its way of life without being abruptly subjugated to the influx of corporate food chains out bidding smaller stores with lower prices, thereby causing the small stores to lose business and eventually close (Public Broadcasting Service, 2018).

We can create a democratized food system by instituting a fair wage mandate for all major food producers, breaking up large agricultural monopolies, and enforcing illegal sharecropping-like practices.

Left underreported on in the U.S., migrant workers remain a common victim of race-based attacks within the food system. There are a number of ways in which the harms to migrant workers or low wage food laborers can be mitigated. We should democratize our food system to hold the stakeholders of food corporations responsible. The first step, shifting the balance away from corporate interests, is to raise the awareness of the harmful acts against the food labor force. Major food suppliers such as Publix Supermarkets, have profited off the labor of low wage farm workers who in frequent cases have been disenfranchised and discriminated against based on their citizenship status. Migrant farmers' contribution to the supply chain in the U.S. is considerable; however, they work in what is often considered slave labor conditions (Screen Media Ventures, LLC, 2011).

There is not one solution to solve all the harms caused by capitalist food chains and the historical bad practices of colonization that created today's food system. Creative pursuit will help alleviate some burdens for small towns affected by corporate food chains as much of today's food system is a monopsony. For migrant farmers to be treated humanely, it will take greater scrutiny from the American public to hold corporations accountable to every laborer contributing to their revenue. By raising awareness and emphasizing social responsibility to corporations, we will enhance the conditions for food laborers consequently democratizing our food system and we become less morally objectionable with our purchases as consumers.

References

- Norgaard, K. M., Reed, R., & Van Horn, C. (2011). A Continuing Legacy: Institutional Racism, Hunger, and Nutritional Justice on the Klamath. In A. H. Alkon & J. Agyeman (Eds.), *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability* (pp. 23–46). chapter, MIT Press.
- Public Broadcasting Service. (2018). *Students sell groceries in a Nebraska town. Iowa PBS*.
<https://www.iowapbs.org/mtom/story/31743/students-sell-groceries-nebraska-town>.
- Screen Media Ventures, LLC. (2011). *Food Chains. Popcornflix*.
<https://www.popcornflix.com/watch/channel/documentaryshorts/movie/18-ccg4zda1c8ug-food-chains>.
- Vandana, S. (2015). In W. Berry (Ed.), *The Vandana Shiva reader* (pp. 71–112). chapter, The University Press of Kentucky.