

UNDERSTANDING OUR FOOD SYSTEMS

What Is It? A workshop to uncover the roots of our food system

Why Do It?

- Help people understand the ecological/social crisis of our current food and farming system.
- Illustrate the relationship between racial, economic, and ecological justice through the example of food and agriculture.

Time 2 hours (including 1 hour for optional small group activity)

Materials Needed

- Butcher Paper
- Markers
- 2 Handouts (see attached)

I. INTRODUCTION

2 min

Directions

1. Ask everyone to take 1 minute to come up with a headline (can be tabloid style, funny, or not) about some food/diet/farming related article they've read or heard about.

Give them 1 minute to think

2. Ask people to share but not to repeat themes.

(Optional) Write up headlines on butcher paper.

If people are really stuck, suggest some themes like:

- Food riots
- High food prices to continue
- Corn for ethanol
- Farmer suicides
- Black folks die of diet-related diseases more than white folks
- Poor communities lack access to fresh produce
- Hunger in Africa

3. **Summarize:** "We all have some idea that something is wrong with our food system—the way we grow, get, and eat food. It is closely connected to some of the systemic forces we know are problematic—like capitalism, racism, and sexism. Let's go deeper and try to connect the dots."

II. PARADIGMS

50 minutes

Directions

- Put up Butcher Paper with the following information written up but leave off the examples (e.g.,).

(Alternatively, just write up the left side dominant paradigm and have folks fill in right side based on what they know of indigenous or other systems)

Dominant Paradigm	People & Nature-centered Paradigm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> profit-centered—food grown for marketplace rather than self-sufficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> centered on sustaining people & environment—meeting people’s food needs while restoring what’s used
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> industrial & driven by corporate-controlled technology requires import of often toxic/dead inputs—hybrid or GE seed (which can’t reproduce itself), fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, fossil fuel for tractors, etc. toxic outputs—groundwater contamination, global warming due to massive fossil-fuel based transport system social upheaval—people displaced by imports and by technology/fossil fuel to go work in factories in other parts of the world (like Mexican farmers working in the meat processing plants in the Midwest—both farming communities impacted by industrialization) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> place-based technology derived from generations of knowledge of growing culturally appropriate crops on the land in that place utilizes locally available inputs that are biological rather than chemical outputs are useful either to people (food or other uses such as for housing or art), livestock, or other species (birds, bees, soil microorganisms, etc.) agrarian life holds people, meets social needs—different tasks for people with different family roles, celebration, etc.

Dominant Paradigm	People & Nature-centered Paradigm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ monocrop & monocultural—e.g. genetically engineered “vitamin A rice” as a huge monocrop ■ requires wiping out biodiversity (a field of corn vs. the kind of gardens you see here) ■ only highly productive at producing one output—easier for mechanization/industrialization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ diverse & polycultural—e.g. native rice grown in small paddies surrounded by indigenous plants including green leafy vegetables with high vitamin A content ■ highly productive but not in producing just one output
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ concentrates increasing levels of power and control in a smaller number of corporations ■ biopiracy—theft of indigenous knowledge for profit (like attempt to patent Neem) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ control of technology (seeds, knowledge) land, and other resources in the hands of the people ■ resources are distributed to meet needs

Unfortunately, while the dominant paradigm really does exist in a pretty pure form, the people-centered alternative has had a hard time surviving.

5. Ask people to take turns reading each box. Go through each aspect of the chart one at a time. Ask people to speak up if they can think of an example that illustrates the point.
6. If people can't volunteer with examples, facilitator should provide some.
7. Ask: What would the headlines about food/diet/farming look like if we had the food system on the right rather than what we have today?

III. SMALL GROUP EXERCISE

1 hour

**Materials
Needed**

- handout of chart (see below)
- 2 butcher papers each for report back
- markers

Directions

1. Explain activity
 - We've got 3 different food items here, with 2 versions of each item. In each case, one marketed as sustainable and one put out through the mega food chain that ends up in Safeway.
Corn: GMO corn & organic local corn
Chicken: Tyson Chicken & one raised for SF Farmers' Market or CSA
Bread: Wonder Bread & locally grown/baked bread
 - We'll break into six small groups and each group will each get one item in one of the versions. (Note: Take items out of the mix if there are fewer than 6 groups.)
 - Your task is to identify the costs that are not reflected in the price and who pays the price for those. Read the instructions on your handout. (These are called "externalities.")
2. Count off or bunch up depending on space. Groups should have no more than 5 people for optimal participation
3. Pass out the a copy of the Info Sheet for 1 item + blank chart + butcher paper + markers to each group
4. After 25 minutes in small groups, bring groups back to large group for report back. Ask them to select one item to report back on (corn, chicken, or bread) and have the sustainable and industrial group send a representative up to share for 5 minutes.
5. Ask: What are the costs you identified for your product? In the process of turning this item into something people eat, who pays and who benefits? How does that compare with what the other group with your item (i.e. the sustainable or industrial one) found?
6. After both groups have reported back, ask: What did you discover? How much do you feel like you know about what you eat? Why do you think this information wasn't made clear to you by the manufacturer/farmer/etc. if it wasn't?

IV. WRAP UP/CLOSING

While personal consumer choices are often the first place we jump to when we learn this kind of information, we know that what's available to us is a systemic issue. How is this a systemic issue? Where do most people buy their food? Are there other options, especially in working-class neighborhoods?

APPENDIX 1: ACTIVITY HANDOUT FOR SMALL FOOD GROUPS

SMALL FOOD GROUPS CHART

Read your handout about the two items & then fill out this chart.

Choose someone to report back.

For each item, discuss & write answers into the chart or butcher paper:

What did it cost (environmental externalities, labor, land use, actual price, etc.)

- *What were the inputs? – land, water, seed, chemicals, petroleum, labor, ...*
- *What was the waste output? – greenhouse gases, chemicals in the soil & water,*

Who paid?

Who benefited?

Item: _____

Item: _____

	COST (\$ and environmental externalities)	SOCIAL/RACIAL JUSTICE (Who pays/Who benefits?)	
		+	-
Seed			
Farm			
Transport			
Market			
Consumer			
Dump/Compost			

Instructions for report back

- Send a rep up to describe the costs they identified for their product.
- Talk about who pays/benefits
- Try to add to, not repeat things that prior groups identified
- Discuss how what your group found compares with the other group that had the same item (corn, chicken, or bread)

APPENDIX 2: CHICKEN HANDOUT

The tail of two chickens

Tyson Whole Chicken, raised in confinement on a South Carolina factory “farm”, shipped and bought at Wal-Mart in Oakland

1. The chicken is a clone developed for maximum breast size, water retention, and docileness, raised on a “contract farm” in South Carolina. It is one of 1 50,000 chicken being raised in small cages in massive warehouses. Each 211 by 211 cage holds 6 chickens, whose beaks were melted off when they were chicks to limit the damage they can do to each other as they peck each other in their cramped conditions. The chickens never leave their cage, and are killed along an industrial conveyer belt that processes 5,000 chickens each day.
2. The chicken is actually owned by the Tyson Corporation, and the “farmer” leases the life to raise and sell it, using all Tyson supplied genetically engineered feed corn, antibiotics, growth hormones and other drugs. The farmer gets a set price for each chicken, but bears most the liability if there is a catastrophe.
3. The “farm” and chicken processing/packing plant is staffed by non-union documented and undocumented immigrant laborers who earn minimum wage with no benefits. The job security is nil. The work is very dangerous and difficult.
4. The chicken is frozen and shipped frozen by train and truck to Wal-Mart, where it is sold at \$5.95 for a whole chicken.

Happy Chicken, raised on a small organic farm in Petaluma, trucked to Community Market in El Cerrito.

1. The chicken is one of 1,000 raised each year by the middle-size “Happy Chicken Farm” in Petaluma. The chicken was fed organic, locally grown feed, and is “free-range”, meaning it ran with its chicken sisters in an open pasture. The chicken received no hormones, antibiotics or drugs.
2. The farm is primarily operated by the owning family, and has a dozen nonunion farm laborers, mostly undocumented immigrants, who work for \$10/hour. Many have worked with the farm for years.
3. The chicken is slaughtered by hand and packed fresh the day it is shipped to Community Market in El Cerrito, where it costs \$13 for a whole organic chicken.

APPENDIX 3: CORN HANDOUT

Who's got your ear? (of corn)

Genetically engineered corn grown in Iowa, shrink-wrapped into a 12-pack. Purchased at Costco in Oakland.

1. The "Roundup Ready Corn" is genetically engineered so that the corn plants are resistant to Roundup herbicide (meaning that when the farmer sprays Roundup herbicide via airplanes on his/her fields, all plants are killed by the herbicide except the corn).
2. Seed is owned by Monsanto Corporation. It is leased to the farmer for a premium price, and grown under a contract that prohibits the farmer from saving or sharing her/his own seed. The farmer must buy new seed from Monsanto each year.
3. The corn is grown on a 20,000-acre farm in Iowa, using satellite watering systems, massive machine tillers, planters and harvesters. The operation employs only a handful of laborers who, unlike fresh produce farming, do not work in the fields, but manage large machinery used to process the corn from harvester to truck-trailers to be shipped around the US. The packers are non-union undocumented workers being paid \$6/hour.
4. The farm environment is a "mono-culture", with nothing growing for hundreds of square miles but corn and soy (on this and neighboring "farms")
5. To get to Oakland's Costco, the corn was shipped 1500 miles by train and truck.
6. The corn costs \$.20/ear by the dozen.

Organic heirloom corn grown on a small farm outside Sebastopol, sold by the ear by one of the farmers at a farmers market in Oakland.

1. The corn is an old heirloom variety, grown for its great taste and adaptation to the growing conditions in Sebastopol. No synthetic fertilizers or herbicides are used on this farm. Compost, made as part of the farming operation, enriches the soil and corn. The farm is very diverse, with over 2 dozen crops, and lots of local birds, pollinators and wildlife.
2. The seed is owned by the farmers. She/he saves her/his own seed, selecting each year for a more robust variety for that farm's conditions.
3. The farm is 40 acres, and is primarily farmed by the farming family and two full-time, resident employees. They also hire 4 farm laborers during harvest. They are non-union undocumented laborers paid \$10/hour.
4. To get to the farmers market, the farmers drive their bio-diesel truck 45 miles.
5. The corn cost \$.40/ear direct from the farmers.

APPENDIX 4: BREAD HANDOUT

Wonder Bread... Wonder how?

Wonder Bread. Purchased at Safeway online & delivered to your home.

1. The flour is purchased from the mills of Cargill who purchase it from large farms all over the world but mostly in the U.S. At the mill, the germ and bran are taken out of it to be sold separately and the resulting flour is white.
2. Most of the wheat is grown on farms that are 10-20,000 acres large and are in the Midwest, using satellite watering systems, massive machine tiller, planters and harvesters. The farm operations employ only a handful of laborers who, unlike fresh produce farming, do not work in the fields, but manage large machinery used to process the wheat from harvester to truck-trailers to be shipped to the mills.
3. The farm environment is a "mono-culture", with nothing growing for hundreds of square miles but wheat (on this and neighboring "farms"). Synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides are used.
4. The mill workers are non-union undocumented workers being paid \$7/hour.
5. Interstate Bakeries Corporation buys the milled flour and delivers it to a bakery in San Leandro where it is combined with 13 vitamin and mineral additives and various natural and chemical ingredients to make bread. The factory employs 300 union workers at wages from \$10-\$18/hour.
6. It is delivered to a unionized Safeway (slightly higher wages than the bakery) in Oakland and then delivered to your home.
7. By the time it gets to your home, it has traveled over 1700 miles by train and truck.
8. The bread costs \$2.50/loaf.

Organic Wheat Bread from grain grown on a farm in Yolo County, baked and sold at Arizmendi in Emeryville.

1. The wheat is sold whole, grown for its hardiness and adapted to the northern California climate. No synthetic pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers are used. The farmer owns the seeds, selecting from the plants most suited to the local conditions each year and saving them to plant the next year.
2. A draft horse is used instead of a tractor to till the soil, plant the wheat, and harvest. This minimizes oil use on the farm.
3. Organic methods are utilized including utilizing aged manure from a local dairy, growing cover crops to replenish the soil, rotating crops, and growing a diversity of plants to support a healthy ecosystem—bugs (including ones that eat the pests), birds, bees, and other wildlife.
4. The farm is 50 acres, and is primarily farmed by the farming family and two full-time, resident employees. They also hire 2 farm laborers during harvest. They are non-union undocumented laborers paid \$10/hour.
5. The farmer delivers the grain to Arizmendi Bakery in her diesel truck—90 miles.
6. The grain is ground fresh daily at the bakery and made into bread. The bread is made by members of the cooperative who are paid \$16/hour plus excellent benefits and profit sharing.
7. A loaf of bread cost \$4.50

APPENDIX 5: SUPPLEMENTAL FACILITATOR NOTES

II. WHAT'S GOING ON TODAY

First Globally (with the US being a major player), and then bringing it home to the impact on US communities.

Rising food prices

A. Long Term Causes over the last 20-30 years

1. **Structural adjustment & other neoliberal policies** caused a shift from farming for local consumption to export agriculture.
2. At the same time, continued **subsidies in the EU and US and dumping** of commodity crops makes it impossible for small farmers to compete.
3. World bank & IMF forced governments to **sell off food reserves**
4. Market power of **transnational corporations**. Ability to hold huge amounts of food in warehouses on speculation of price increase. Also small number of corporations controlling how people get their food—through supermarkets, through a few brand names.

DRAW bottleneck of the hourglass: intermediaries/middlemen, distributors

The result was:

- Smallest margin in recent history between supply & demand.
- Many countries are more and more dependent on food imports (no productive agriculture and no food reserves).
- Examples:
 - ⊗ Mexico: From being an exporter of corn a generation ago, Mexico now imports 30%

(and prices have been impacted by corn ethanol production)

- ⊗ Indonesia: From self-sufficiency of soy for tofu & tempeh, Indonesia allowed cheap US soy to flood the market. Now it imports 60% of soy and when prices doubled within weeks in January 2008, this dependence caused a crisis.

B. Short Term Causes over the last 1-2 years

1. **Agrofuels** putting food cropland to use for oil crops due both to rising oil costs and to need for policy makers to look like they're doing something about climate change. ("biofuels" sounds very eco)

Sideline...AGROFUELS

Agrofuels are a good example of how when solutions to ecological problems are framed by the ruling class, poor people, in this case mainly in the global south, will pay the price.

— limited amount of agricultural land available

— EU & US are trying to up the amount of agrofuel they use as % of total fuel consumption.

Note that, especially in the U.S., there is little to no attempt to curb consumption.

— But the oil for this agrofuel must be produced on farmland which is in limited supply in the U.S. and E.U. compared to what they want to consume

— so they are looking to agribusiness to ravage the farmland of the global south to meet their demand. Brazil, Indonesia, Philippines have all devoted huge increases in land to agrofuels.

* The secretary-general of the Indonesian Farmers Union Federation & coordinator of Via Campesina:

“At least 1.5 million tons of Indonesian crude palm oil is exported to Europe, and nearly all is turned into agrofuel. On the other hand, hundreds of people have to queue for subsidized cooking oil. This shows that agrofuel gives rise to competition between cars and human beings and the environment.”

Who do you think will win?

“Those who can afford to drive are certainly richer than those who are in danger of starvation, and money is the major weapon in this capitalistic world.”

-additionally, agrofuel, may in fact exacerbate global warming. According to George Monbiot, each ton of palm oil that is turned into agrofuel releases 33 tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, 10 times more than the emissions released by fossil fuels.

According to an official EU Commission impact assessment, “increased use of biofuels in the EU will be accompanied by an increased external demand for biofuels and their feedstocks, which is likely to have various effects on developing countries... In addition, there are substantial CO₂ losses if grassland is ploughed up or forest cleared. These losses can be expected to outweigh CO₂ gains from biofuels for many years.” It clearly states that “there will be increasing pressures on eco-sensitive areas, notably rainforests, where several millions of hectares could be transformed into plantations.” Among the social effects the paper acknowledges the competition with food, the higher food prices which would hit the poor in developing countries and the pressure on vulnerable communities (to move away or drastically adapt their lifestyles).

—included in the long list of corporate interests behind the agrofuel push are agribusiness (Cargill, Dupont, ADM), big oil (BP), and finance capital.

In addition to agrofuels...

2. **Cost of oil**=> higher cost of fertilizer, pesticides, and transport. Because our food system has become increasingly dependent on these inputs and transport, the rising cost of oil has greatly impacted the cost of food.
3. Entry of **speculators** into food markets. Shift of \$ from mortgage loans to food commodities. \$70 billion of new money into food commodities creating a bubble that leaves food out of reach of poor people and will lead to wiping out millions more small farmers when it bursts.
4. **Climate change** is also affecting people’s ability to produce food in the global south—loss of cropland, inability to grow the things they used to grow there—set to become even worse over time

- Desertification in Africa
- Increased flooding in SE Asia

■ Food riots

- ⊗ Organizing by organizations within the global network of Via Campesina
- ⊗ Clear analysis of the problems of neoliberalism, push to force Global South countries into the global capitalist industrial economy, in particular in the agricultural sector. Small farmers around the world have a much better understanding of the WTO, etc. than people in the US do.

US

In the US, along with the impact of rising food prices, there are other impacts

{Ask people to talk about what issues are facing the communities they're organizing in}

- Supermarket access
- Rising obesity and health problems from diet, especially in poor communities of color in US. This is becoming a global phenomena as US brand name fast food and processed food become globalized. 1 billion in the world people now considered obese.

- ⊗ framed as "personal choice" but actually an access issue
- ⊗ Illusion of choice/food security, especially in poor communities. Little or no access to fresh produce in Bayview Hunters Point impacts health!
- ⊗ Making food into a commodity
- ⊗ We buy products rather than food.

For example, coffee is a pretty pure food item but by controlling the packaging and distribution process, big food corporations are able to make huge profits.

- ❖ Example of Nestle (like our Folger's) in Raj's book—coffee farmer gets only 0.14/kilo. Nestle sells it for \$26.40/kilo—nearly 200 times the cost in Uganda.
- ❖ On the supermarket shelf, it looks like there is a lot of choice but really many brands owned by same TNCs.
- ❖ For example...

Cargill brands

ACT II, PARKAY ANDY CAPP'S, PATIO BANQUET, PEMMICAN, BANQUET BROWN 'N SERVE, PENROSE BLUE BONNET, PETER PAN CRUNCH 'N MUNCH, POPPYCOCK DENNISON'S , RANCH STYLE FIDDLE FADDLE, FLEISCHMANN'S , RO*TEL GULDEN'S, ROSARITA, JIFFY POP, SNACK PACK, KNOTT'S BERRY FARM, SWISS MISS LA CHOY, VAN CAMP'S LIBBY'S, WESSON LUCK'S, WOLF

II. BRIEF HISTORY OF FOOD & AGRICULTURE

More than 800 million people around the world will go to bed hungry tonight. 2/3 are farmers and food producers. M

ore than 50% of the world's population are farmers

At the same time, 1 billion people are now classified as obese.

How has this happened?

Though there have been different methods used throughout the last two centuries, food has consistently been used as a tool of imperialism.

As the logic of capitalism played out, and today we see it in the uber-marketism of neo-liberalism, land and food were commodified—things to be bought and sold—rather than as resources to meet human needs.

Period I. 1800s-WWII

Think of sugar, tea, and spices where under colonialism, imperialist nations took over land and imposed cultivation of these products for export to Europe and America. Assuaging white workers with the tastes of caffeine and sugar by enslaving black and brown peoples and putting their agricultural production onto the world market

Period II. Post WWII-early 1970s

- Industrialization—food processing—1950 intro of TV Dinner when less than 10% of US households had a TV.
- Green Revolution—better living through chemistry—
 - ⊗ Agricultural colonization
 - ⊗ Domination of nature & indigenous forms of knowledge by western science
 - ⊗ Control of seed—move to monocropping
 - ⊗ Control of inputs—need petrochemical inputs produced in factories versus local compost, neem, etc.
 - ⊗ The cost of this was not included in the price the consumer (or TNC) paid. Not full-cost pricing. Land, water, air contamination. Disasters like Bhopal.
- New framework of development & food aid
 - ⊗ Place to dump excess commodities & in the process create new future markets (e.g., wheat creates new markets for bread)
 - ⊗ Political motivated food aid during cold war

By 1968, nearly 80% of US food exports went to the global south:

Period III. Early 1970s-present

- Shift from food aid to loans with structural adjustment conditions
- Along with continuation of green revolution, now with more money for loans to farmers for inputs
- GATT expands to include agriculture under WTO—countries (although US & EU continue) supposed to lower subsidies and other barriers to imports.
- Results in shift to export agriculture

Who Pays?

* Small farmers, rural communities in Global South

— Farmer suicides globally—remember 1980s in the US (FarmAid/Bruce Springsteen), now farmers in India and elsewhere in the global south—are on the rise.

Close to 150,000 Indian farmers committed suicide in nine years from 1997 to 2005.

* Consumers who are not given real choice but instead forced to eat mostly processed food that is causing health problems. Current epidemic of Type 2 diabetes