

**Food Justice in NYC Meeting**  
**Break-out Session Notes**  
**June 28, 2005, 2:30-6:30 pm**

The below notes were taken during the group break-out session piece of the Food Justice in NYC Meeting. The notes are shared so that we may have a common understanding of some of the diverse concerns, thoughts, opinions, hopes, and ideas of meeting attendees. In addition, the feedback provided during this session will also help shape a Community Food Security Agenda for NYS that Hunger Action Network of NYS (HANNYS) is developing with other interested partners and food system stakeholders throughout the state (<http://www.hungeractionnys.org/CommunityFoodPaper.pdf>). Folks should feel free to contact HANNYS or other meeting cosponsors about additional feedback. Each group had a note-taker and a moderator. Attendees were asked to introduce themselves and asked three pre-determined questions by the moderator.

***1. What food-related problems or concerns do you see in your community?***

Group 1

- No grocery stores, price higher in bodega, no organic selection
- Income level ratio with food quality. Low income rotten food
- Prevalence of fast food, restaurants, lack of local organic food
- Fruit veggie better produce than bodegas
- Obesity, diabetes, asthma, health related issues
- New EFP not enough advertisements
- Putting money in CSA is a problem.
- Eligibility of food stamps. Not aware of eligibility

Group 2 (*Moderator: Sheila McCarthy; note-taker: Shivani Rikhy, Sheila*)

- Red Hook neighborhood is cut off and has limited access to subway. The BQE separates wealthy neighborhood from lower income one.
- Bodegas available but not quality supermarkets; there is only one Red Hook and there is limited access to organic produce there.
- Ocean Hill in Brooklyn has limited access to nutritious food. Delis do not have organic produce. Again, segregation is an issue as Ocean Hill is next to Carroll Gardens, which is wealthier and has access to more supermarkets.
- Prices at bodegas are higher.
- Less nutritious food is cheaper generally speaking.
- Red Hook is gentrifying and the area is extremely segregated. There is a strong, distinct racial connection to economic oppression and this is exemplified in Red Hook.
- Voting system is broken and does nothing to empower community in the attempt to combat segregation; the voting system disenfranchises the community - it is not a potential solution, it is part of the problem.
- Many times projects that are meant to empower disenfranchised communities end up being very "top down." Instead of empowering communities, they empower the people who implement and evaluate them.
- Obesity is a problem amongst children.
- Physical Education was eliminated in many schools in NYC.

- School Meals offer food that is very processed and laden with preservatives. Usually food at bodegas is processed, as well.
- Many schools lack appropriate cooking equipment.
- 70% of students in schools in 5 boroughs of NYC are overweight.
- Legislators of Brooklyn are not really involved in the Hunger Task Force meetings that recently developed in each borough of NYC. The one held in Brooklyn was attended by legislative staff, not the legislators themselves.
- Legal immigrants cannot get food stamps {note: some legal immigrants are legally entitled to food stamps, although many might not for variety of reasons }; immigrants have had trouble getting food stamps if they are petitioning to get relatives into U.S.
- Lots of seniors have difficult time overcoming barriers to food stamp program. Many do not understand what they need to do for NYSNIP
- EFP hours are odd.
- Food pantries have difficulty getting enough food to distribute to increasing number of pantry guests.
- Homeless face many barriers in getting the food they need since they do not have access to cooking facilities.

Group 3 (Moderator: Susannah Pasquantonio; Note-taker: Rene Razzano)

- Quality of food at EFPs. People have ailments and sometimes the food isn't appropriate; high sodium quality.
- Food programs are stretched out.
- Destruction of community gardens despite state attorney general settlement - 3 Bronx gardens destroyed > sold to developers for \$1 a lot. Legislators haven't done too much for gardens. Lots of good activists - some bulldozed because they were not green thumb gardens. Good coverage on channel 12 and NY1 and El Diario.
- How can we come to action about this? Through organizations and leaders and residents. The gardens in Rockaways aren't touched – may be due to less development pressure. Gardens can't be taxed. Middle-income housing can be taxed.
- Sometimes there's a form of deterioration of Food Bank food. It's passed back through community - issue of dignity of getting good food. Manufacturers can wait until last minute to donate food and still get tax benefit. We need fewer steps between source of food and people. City Harvest food doesn't have quality food, but you have to take it because you need it.
- Poor quality food in supermarket and high prices for it. Lack of access to organic food because people rely on processed food. Disconnected to real food and people don't know how to cook it.
- Community has large Italian and Irish families, but now it's 3<sup>rd</sup> generation and people who live there have little idea of what good food is. No community gardens > little connection to food. One grocery store for large neighborhood. Bodegas with little fresh food. Even if people make ethnic food they don't know food is so different > tomatoes today are different from tomatoes ten years ago. Masarepa and hot water > corn > no understanding of how food is grown. People think herbicides and pesticides are for environmentalists to worry about and not their concern. GMO {Genetically modified organisms} in about 65% of all foods. Biggest GMO food is now corn, soy (biggest additive-soy milk is becoming popular), canola (canola oil), cotton (cotton seed oil). Lots in banana, papaya, and zucchini. Pollen from farm crops. So many more chemicals and consequences of all choices being

made before food gets to you. All of most important choices already made. Due to top soil erosion, veggies don't have same nutritional value. Veggies in supermarket look so different > large and red even though they don't taste as good. This could be why people aren't eating as good because it doesn't taste as good.

- Lots of Caribbean folks in neighborhood. Doesn't buy food until December when weather changes. He picks fresh string beans and tomatoes. A lot of people don't do backyard gardening.

#### Group 4

- Haitian community and it's low income and language barrier, so people don't know about food programs so people go pantry shopping to survive
- Low-income neighborhood, many people on SSI and SS so their food stamp allotment is too low and they can't afford rent and food (fixed income). Food at bodega and supermarket is not fresh and expensive.
- Live in a remote area without big supermarket
- Washington Heights - people are losing their apartments, they're not old enough to get senior benefits, people pantry shop.
- People are disappointed with the amount of food they get from pantry.
- Haitian church people come for pantry and come back for cooked food (even babies).
- There's no way you can produce in Brooklyn—gardens are getting turned into houses.

#### Group 5

- Lack of access to fresh nutritious foods > some people do not perceive this lack as a problem
- Lack of income to purchase food
- Competition from sources such as McDonald's > huge marketing campaign
- Ratio of calories to dollars
- Lack of communication about how to get food assistance
- School food > highly processed
- Lack of transportation in some areas (i.e. Staten Island)
- Lack of kitchen facilities (i.e. for people who only rent a room)
- EFPs not always in area where people live - inconvenient hours of operation
- Price disparities
- Huge energy expenditure to bring food into NYC (since food can only be brought by road into NYC)
- Food and food quality might not be priority > we spend less on food than any other country in US

## ***2. What food-related opportunities or assets are available?***

#### Group 1

- CSA
- Community garden in South Bronx, growth of food
- Open to gardening
- Community center that serves seniors
- Meals on Wheels

## Group 2

- Nutrition Outreach and Education Program coordinators in each borough of NYC.
- Fine Fair is a new market with fresh produce. It's the first one in Red Hook.
- CSAs in the Bronx offer sliding scale payment plans and accept food stamps. Currently sampling CSA produce in Tremont area to solicit more lower income members. In addition, 2 new EFPs interested in joining CSA in Bronx. CSAs give a lot of produce in exchange for money---it is very worth it.
- Just Food sponsors trips to farms and cooking demonstrations.
- Farmers Markets
- Community Gardens
- City Farms program via Just Food
- Youth farm stands
- Hunger Task Forces are starting in each borough headed by president of borough and EFPs and community leaders. This has the potential to impact government officials.
- Farm to School projects that bring fresh, organic locally grown food to NYC schools.
- Food Banks can offer various resources

## Group 3

- Opportunities increasing for gardening - people know how to.
- Gentrification can have benefits - new food stores and yoga places, but it's not helpful if sometimes people can't afford the new services.
- Farm market in Red Hook, middle of Bronx - near Fordham
- Use every inch for veggies
- Lack of vegetarian food. People get watered down food.
- NYC afraid of lawsuits regarding planting fruit and nut trees as street trees.
- Roof access (she has a slanted roof) - parts of park
- People can do backyard gardens. Reluctant to remove some of the trees.
- One neighborhood has all two story houses but backyards are all paved (from 1950)
- No community gardens in neighborhood because there's no space
- People could learn about harvesting wild edibles - mulberry trees everywhere. Green Guerillas has maps of community gardens, but green thumb must have inventory. They spray in parks

## Group 4

- Some people in community know how to grow, but there is no space to grow.
- There are EFPs that many people visit, so there's a captive audience.
- A CSA
- Rooftop gardens
- Federal funding
- People's will
- Matching soup kitchens with farmers
- Farmers' markets

## Group 5

- Food production in community gardens
- Need to create financial incentives for people to convert unused land into gardens/farms

- Need to change language (i.e. soup kitchen > community kitchen) to give people a sense of empowerment
- Many older immigrant populations use community gardens (but there is a generation gap)
- Graduated scale for CSA shares
- Pilot program to get EBT machines in NYS farmers' markets

### **3. *What next steps would be most helpful?***

#### Group 1

- Client Choice
- Seniors empowered in gardening
- Donate food from markets to pantries
- More info in food curriculum, sustainable choice
- Policy, affordable fresh culturally appropriate local food
- Make issues known to politicians
- Having focus groups. Take a model and bring to community
- Get community to acknowledge there is a problem
- Get [sic] people how to prepare food
- Food assessment
- Urban food security class
- Possible listserv

#### Group 2

- Mobilize to get elected officials to attend Hunger Task Force meetings---not just their staff!
- Identify food providers in Brooklyn and collaborate so that they coordinate schedules better with pantry hours for food rescue projects. Establish a coalition or committee that can synchronize schedules with pantry providers.
- Coordinate mapping project to identify food resources.
- Empower people through grassroots mobilization to increase access to food and build community food system that is just.
- Political system needs to change via campaign finance reform so that lower income community residents will be elected and in office more often.
- Nutrition education and information on how to “spend thrifty” and buy healthy food at same time.
- Duplicate education techniques promoted by Dr. Katz who recommends successful ways to teach about nutrition in elementary schools (he has a book available).

#### Group 3

- More food from trees
- Land tenure for community gardens - tools, seeds, technical assistance to grow seeds.
- Reduce food miles to feet
- Empowering communities so they have a say; truly empower people.
- A structure so that legislature has to pay attention to poor people. Right now government doesn't listen to folks. A lot of us don't have power.
- Lots of farmers. Net exporter of corn is Mexico. Because of this, should add US government onto food chain

#### Group 4

- Conferences with daycare on Saturdays.
- Make it easy for community people to come. Follow through on meetings (once a year is not enough).
- Look at bureaucracy.
- Collaboration between organizations.
- Financial help.
- Make food stamp applications easier.
- Government should subsidize the farmers' markets, so that the person will get more food for their benefit
- Work with the waste in schools. Schools throw out a lot of food like milk (but it's illegal) - let City Harvest do it.
- Community food watchdog council to see where there's waste, surplus, need.

#### Group 5

- Connecting EFPs to social services like food stamps
- Need to expand hours of operation of EFPs
- Need to change people's mindsets about government benefits
- Need to normalize alternative food sources like food co-ops, CSAs, farmers' markets
- Create sister CSAs > sliding scale between CSAs (i.e. UWS and South Bronx)
- Facilitated enrollment process for food stamps
- Redirect government funding from big agriculture to small farmers

A representative from each group then provided highlights of the group's discussion.

In addition, Marly Hornik from New York State Against Genetic Engineering (NYSAGE) shared that she is available to do free presentations on GMOs at communities throughout the region. For more information, you can reach her at [marly@marlyhornik.com](mailto:marly@marlyhornik.com) or (917) 589-6931.

In addition, Lateef Sadiq of the Khidmah Corporation (507 Ralph Ave., Brooklyn, NY) runs grant-writing workshops. Email: [ls7861@netzero.com](mailto:ls7861@netzero.com). Telephone: 347-251-0779