



Food and Human Rights: Chicago and the Globe

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Introduction

The possibility of achieving environmental justice is completely intertwined with policies and practices that are designed and implemented in a manner that both mimics and protects the Earth's ecosystems. While it is true that most "native" or "indigenous" people have historically honored Mother Earth and Father Sky, it is also true that, from the earliest times, we have degraded the ecosystems to which we are intimately interconnected. It is not until recent historical times, however, that human activities have accelerated to the point of threatening the very existence of life as we know it on this planet.

From a spiritual and "religious" point of view, we have lost our intimate contact with, and sacred notions of, the natural world. They have been replaced with a notion of "civilization" and "religion," that has disconnected the mind from the body and humans from the natural world, the world from which ALL of the things we are dependent upon for sustenance are derived.

Now we are expected to worship at the altar of science, technology and money at the expense of the environment on which we depend for our very lives. We are asked to give up the ancient wisdom, which has been passed down to us from generation to generation for one hundred millennia. While it is impossible to return to the way things used to be, it is possible to incorporate the wisdom of the ancients into our policies and practices for the immediate and long-term future.

While the sustainable policies and practices are designed and implemented, it is important to note that there are probably no industrial or economic practices that are entirely environmentally benign. Rather, it is reasonable to work toward those human activities, industrial, economic or otherwise, that does the least amount of damage or has as small an ecological footprint as possible.

The ecological footprint is a measuring tool used for calculating the amount of ecological resources required to support a human in a particular society. While an in-depth overview of the concept is beyond the scope of this paper a simplified explanation is that an ecological footprint transmutes patterns of human consumption into areas of productive land essential to providing resources and for absorbing waste products. The ecological footprint of a person in the United States measured in hectares is 9.72. The global average for comparison is 2.03 hectares. "Developed" countries such as Canada 7.29 hectares, France 5.27 hectares and Italy 4.05 hectares are dramatically higher

than those of “underdeveloped” countries such as Costa Rica 2.84 hectares, India 1.22 hectares and Bangladesh at 0.41 hectares¹⁻².

What we can deduce from the numbers is a system that is unjust in terms of resource allocation. We can also deduce that the concept of “developed” countries, particularly using countries such as the United States and Canada as the model is grossly unsustainable.

To reduce the human footprint in ways that are just, and indeed sustainable, will require a dramatic and major paradigm shift from the dominant ruling social, political and economic order. Achieving the goal of environmental (or social or economic) justice will indeed require a monumental shift in the dominant psychological and spiritual elements of global society.

The current global regime is relentless in its attack on all cultural, spiritual and psychological patterns that are incompatible with the goals of global homogeneity sought by corporate governments and their handlers: the global corporate elites.

International (as opposed to global) social, psychological, cultural, spiritual economic and political operations will, if we are to survive as sentient beings, have to become grounded in the realization that we are all interconnected. Or as the great Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn states, we are “interbeings.”

We indeed inhabit what has been termed the Commons. Because we are interbeings and share the Commons we can only create systems of thought and action that operate within the framework of interconnectedness and that protect our common heritage.

With this knowledge of our interconnections, we must (if we are to achieve any real and lasting justice – environmental or otherwise -) make a commitment to developing ways of sheltering, feeding, clothing, transporting, educating, recreating and praying that are renewable and honor our intimate, sacred cosmic relationship to each other as well as other sentient beings.

Environmental justice is not enough, the problems and solutions required to overcome the monumental environmental, social, economic, cultural and psychological devastation that is occurring **globally** cannot be done as the movement for justice is currently constituted. It is not a question of where nuclear waste should be stored; it is a question of not producing any more nuclear waste and dealing with what currently exists in ways that protect humans and the environment for the next 10,000 to 100,000 years. It is not a question of protecting our topsoil now but a question of how we insure that we can produce food for billions of people for thousands of years. If we can't answer these questions and formulate the strategies required to overcome the massive damage done to the land, the sky and the seas then the notion of any kind of

justice is moot. Justice must be extended to the generations of the next millennia and that can only be done by protecting the natural heritage that we've inherited. Justice is not a contemporary trend, it is an intergenerational event that does not accrue to one group or another but it applies to all.

The global food system provides us with an opportunity to apply advanced and sophisticated approaches to overcoming injustices that threaten humanity and require that we move beyond environmental justice.

Moving beyond environmental justice means that we must begin to advocate and apply a wide-ranging strategic and tactical approach to problems that render solutions that encompass all areas of human activity, while protecting the ecosystems of which we are interdependent. Moving beyond environmental justice denotes that for example the formation of financial institutions that support the redevelopment of inner city communities and the development of an ecologically conscious and sustainable African-American business community. That emerging business community will rely on renewable energy to power its operations; it will utilize vehicles that use fuels that will vastly reduce if not eliminate air pollution. Why? – Because it will protect the respiratory health of all communities, including the African-American community that has been “disproportionately” impacted. Let's end the notion of disproportionate impacts and move beyond to **no** impacts.

The essence of moving beyond or to the next level of the movement is characterized by becoming solution oriented in ways that solve problems for all communities. Fighting to maintain the moratorium on landfills on Chicago's southeast side or shutting down the municipal incinerator on the west side is only partial justice. It raises the specter that the fight will continue in another community, because we know that injustice follows the path of least resistance. Here lies the problem – the movement must evolve and become solution oriented. Strategies for managing waste must be developed and implemented that reduce greatly or eliminate the problem so that no community is faced with the burden of handling waste. Likewise in terms of food the movement should fight against the proliferation of genetically modified food or industrial agriculture both in the U.S. and globally. The solutions must be applied to the global community and not applied in a jingoistic or nationalistic manner. That is real justice; justice beyond the current application of environmental justice. In order for there to be any justice, fairness and equity they must be applied universally – one slave is one too many.

Moving Beyond and Food

The industrial model of agriculture that is ravenously replacing smaller scale models of agriculture contribute dramatically to the much larger ecological

footprint of the “developed” countries of the global North such as the United States.

The importance of food to life itself, as well to the overall health profile of a community makes it as important an element for vigilance by the activist and academic communities as any other. Air for breathing; water for proper functioning at the cellular level and food for energy required for all aspects of life demand that their sources are protected and that these resources be available to all in a just and secure manner.

If you have any doubt about the importance of these essentials of life giving and sustaining elements then consider the following. You can live only a manner of minutes without air, for 3 to 4 days without water and for 7 days or so without food. And even when those things are available their quantity and quality have a huge influence upon the quality of our lives. They determine how well we learn, how much and the quality of work we can do. Because these elements are so fundamental to our lives they are as important if not more important than any other issues that we concern ourselves with as a movement for environmental, social and economic justice.

The environmental justice movement can ill afford not to be vigilant about every aspect of the food system. The movement must protect the health of landowners and land workers alike; it must protect the soil and the waterways and it must insure that farmers and farm workers are paid a fair and equitable wage for their work. To fail in this regard would be a monumental disaster and seriously damage our credibility as a movement. Also we must with regard to the sanctity of our food system move beyond environmental justice and work with various institutions to develop systematic approaches that solve the ecological crisis posed by industrial agriculture.

This chapter will critique how we feed ourselves and offer some suggestions for solving the environmental and environmental justice problems associated with the dominant model of industrial agriculture.

Food and Justice

Food plays a role that is generally overlooked when one thinks or talks about environmental justice. Yet food, how it is produced, transported and distributed has a monumental impact on the quality of our communities and the environment. It is amazing when one considers the importance of food how it does not receive the environmental justice consideration that it richly deserves.

Industrial agriculture is at all levels of its activities a source of negative outcomes to human and environmental health³ This is primarily true because humans are, whether we realize it or not, intimately connected to the Earth’s ecosystems like

all other living things. An unhealthy environment places humans at risk for a host of health problems just as other living beings are at risk when their environment becomes unhealthy. Whether it is a pond, forest, or ocean, when an ecosystem is degraded it has a negative impact upon the community of plants and animals that occupy it. That is why the frogs are deformed, the flora and fauna of the forests go extinct and that most of the globe's wild fisheries are on the verge of collapse.

Industrial agriculture is a major source of environmental—and, by extension, human--degradation today more than ever. The proliferation and accumulation of pollutants due to the use of herbicides and pesticides has created numerous events of ground and surface water pollution⁴⁻⁹. The companies that manufacture these substances are often times amongst those cited as being some of the greatest sources of pollution on the planet. Furthermore, the industrial or factory farms for poultry, cattle and hogs create a monumental environmental threat¹⁰

Likewise farmers and farm workers display a variety of symptoms from their exposure to the compounds that produce agricultural inputs such as herbicides and pesticides. The exposure of agricultural sector workers manifests itself in an array of disorders amongst the workers¹¹⁻¹⁵ and the surrounding rural communities¹⁶⁻¹⁸.

The literature is replete with farmworkers reporting symptoms from pesticide exposures such as headaches, dizziness, confusion, irritability, muscle twitching; gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramps and respiratory symptoms such as nose and throat irritation, shortness of breathe and difficulty breathing. The exposures globally are such that they cannot be ignored as they pose a huge public health crisis that should be addressed immediately.

The environmental risks to the land the people and the ecosystems are such that industrial agriculture must command the attention of environmental justice advocates and activists. The stated concern of the movement about protecting people where they live, work, play, learn and pray is no more compelling anywhere than it is with respect to pesticides in the agricultural (and non-agricultural) setting. Whole systems thinking and solutions must be sought by the environmental justice movement and those in and working on behalf of the agricultural community to eliminate the overall risks posed by industrial agriculture. Moving beyond environmental justice in this instance means supporting agricultural policies such as organic agricultural techniques in an effort to drastically reduce if not eliminate pesticide use.

Resource depletion such as the loss of topsoil is another negative environmental outcome of the industrial agricultural system. When considered from the context of food production, topsoil ranks near the top (next to water) of the assets we acquire from nature. If you don't believe it, consider for a moment that you can

live only a few moments without air, 3 or 4 days without water, and 5 to 7 days without food. Yet soil erosion and the loss of topsoil are not often thought of as important issues within the framework of the environmental or environmental justice movements. It should fly up near the top of our concerns when we consider that we are losing our capacity to grow most of our food if we do not eliminate topsoil depletion.

The loss of agricultural land due to residential or industrial “development,” is a global problem. As many communities expand or sprawl into natural or agricultural lands, they are lost to production for a very long time, if not forever. All of these scenarios are unsustainable in the long term and threaten the ecological heritage that our future generations will have to rely upon for their very existence. Will we leave them an ecological debt that they cannot repay? Will our practices vastly reduce the quality of life or indeed end life, as we know it? I do not want to know the answer. I would rather solve the problems and create a global food system that is just and sustainable.

The Food Chain and How It Impacts Human and Ecosystem Health

A food chain that in the United States is often times over 2,000 miles long creates pollution problems related to the sheer volume of the fleet required to transport food over long distances. This is done in spite of the fact that a lot of food that is transported can be produced in local rural communities and indeed in urban communities as well. Why, for example, do we have an overwhelming prevalence of apples from Washington being distributed and sold across the United States? This is a particularly compelling question for me and other residents in Chicago when one recognizes that the Midwestern United States is perfectly suited to grow many apple varieties. Indeed Michigan farmers as well as those in other Midwestern states produce fine apples. In fact the best apples that I had during the last autumn apple season came from Illinois and Michigan, with the absolute best coming from an organic farm in Michigan. The renovation and redevelopment of fruit production such as apples, pears and peaches in the Midwest/Great Lakes region can create tremendous regional economic development opportunities as well contribute to the reduction of air pollution due to the transport of food in diesel trucks over the lengthy food chain.

The development of a vast urban agriculture system can also accomplish the same outcomes for urban inhabitants. Rooftops and greenhouses on vacant plots can provide tons of food for residents. As an economic development and business engine, urban agriculture can provide employment and socially responsible investment opportunities. Many living wage jobs associated with crop production, harvesting, packing, transport, distribution and sales could be created.

Social benefits would also accrue because people would be able to work close to home, new and affordable housing would be built (because greater urban densities would result from local job creation), and communities would become more robust and vibrant, healthy and sustainable.

Healthy Communities and Ecosystems

To do all of these things in ways that are environmentally sound would contribute tremendously to the development of healthy ecosystems, communities and individuals in the long term. Long-term solutions are required because many environmental pollutants will persist for perhaps hundreds of years even if the sources of the pollution were to cease immediately.

Public health factors contribute mightily to the importance of food and, of course nutrition, which is a function of our patterns of food consumption. I am reminded of how often during my time working with environmental justice organizations when community members were outraged when some public “official” commented that environmental factors were not the cause of public health problems; and that the causes were, instead, related to their personal habits such as poor diet, smoking, drinking and recreational drug use or what public health authorities call “health behaviors”.

While the outrage was warranted because the official’s argument was generally dismissive of environmental factors and their contribution to poor health outcomes in affected communities, the argument was **also** warranted because community and public health outcomes are **also** health behaviors such as those clearly associated with nutrition, alcohol, and tobacco and drug consumption patterns and particularly so in communities of color¹⁹.

The connection between nutrition and health is incontrovertible. Poor nutrition is linked to cardiovascular disease, several kinds of cancer, diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and other degenerative diseases²⁰⁻³¹.

Similarly nutrition is dramatically linked to optimal prenatal and postnatal development in infants and children. The links between poor nutrition and birth defects, poor motor skills and lower intelligence and academic achievement are conclusive as well.³²

The importance of nutrition in optimal health can never be minimized. That of course does not mean that environmental injustice and environmental racism experienced by communities due to the siting of a variety of toxic and polluting facilities, the emission of industrial pollutants or fly dumping can be exonerated as a major cause of negative health indices in the community. Rather it is one of several factors impacting the communities of color in general and the African-American community in general. The lack of access to quality food, and

instruction about nutrition and food preparation is as serious a problem as any other examples of environmental injustice and racism. The “public official” should add access to quality food, reduction of the availability of liquor, cigarettes and drugs and the dearth of education related to nutrition and food preparation to other instances of environmental injustice and racism as part of a wholistic assessment of what contributes to poor public health outcomes in a community. A healthy food environment is just as important to developing healthy communities as any other aspect of the environment.

The Food Environment and Community Access

The case can and has been made that food access is indeed an environmental justice issue. Recent research done by Dr. Kimberly Morland and her associates has demonstrated that there is a probable link between higher incidences of various diseases and a distinct lack of access to quality food while having excellent access to liquor stores and fast food restaurants in African – American communities. The corollary is that there is a link between lower incidences of various disease outcomes in the White community and an abundance of access to quality food and a comparative lower rate of liquor stores³³

The findings of the research confirmed scientifically what has been known empirically: that there is indeed a dearth of quality food establishments in African – American communities.

The study indicates that produce consumption rose by 32 percent for each additional supermarket in the Black community, while in the White community the comparable increase was only 11 percent³⁴.

Fat, which is a major contributor to obesity, a risk factor for cardiovascular disease and cancer among other diseases is readily available through the various purveyors of fast and “ethnic” foods found in the community. Grocery stores and supermarkets, on the other hand, can facilitate more healthful food consumption practices. For example, the Morland study found that the presence of at least one supermarket in a Black neighborhood was associated with a 25 percent increase in the number of residents who limited their fat intake³⁵.

The dearth of purveyors of quality food within the African-American community is a contributing factor to the overall poor health outcomes in the national Black community. Along with other well known instances of environmental, economic and social injustice the food environment that is characterized by its’ profound lack of access indicate that the prognosis for developing healthy communities critical to optimal human development is grim. Attitudes must change inside and outside of the community, concurrently the shift in attitude must translate into policy and institutional initiatives designed to create healthy communities particularly for those that have not been provided with the tools required for optimal human growth and development. Remember, if one person or group is

oppressed then we are all oppressed. Lack of access and food insecurity is indeed oppression.

Equitable Access as an Environmental Justice Issue

The need to establish grocery stores and other outlets for quality food in African – American communities is an environmental justice issue as important as any other. It is clear from our research that the national (and global) Black community is plagued by a host of social/economic problems and that the creation of healthy and sustainable communities will require a whole systems approach to develop the institutions and organizations required to achieve this goal. Therefore it is necessary to be equally concerned about what and how people eat as we are about the quality of the air, water and soil in and around those communities. The exposure to toxins and pollutants is profoundly important but so is access to quality--and to the greatest extent possible--locally produced food. As a community, we can no longer afford to take an either/or approach; we must eat nutritious, wholesome foods to maintain our health and we must eliminate--or to the greatest extent possible--reduce our exposure to harmful environmental impacts. In other words bad food is as harmful to our health as landfills and transfer stations or exposure to the chemicals and toxins that our bodies are burdened by.

The creation of a food system that is equitable, secure and ecologically sustainable is a monumental challenge that must be solved for the sake of our future generations as well as the present.

Biotechnology and Justice

I will take some space here to refute the techno-genetic approach proposed by the corporate elites who claim that in order to solve the problems associated with food security; the world must uncritically embrace bioengineered or genetically modified foods (GMOs). The misgivings about this food production trend favored by the corporate food and chemical giants abound, and for good reason.

First let us deal with the inherently unjust and undemocratic nature of the drive to genetically modify our food. The one question that I have is who asked me (or anyone else for that matter) if this approach to food production is acceptable? There was no referendum, no ballot initiative, and no democratic process whereby the citizenry was provided an opportunity to register approval or dissent for GMOs. Related to that, one must ask why (particularly in the United States) the corporate elites oppose any disclosure or labeling initiatives. In a truly just and democratic society one should at least be able to decide if one wants to ingest genetically modified food. As is typical, corporations make such decisions, unilaterally, for the vast majority of the populace, in effect making corporate rule

tantamount to minority rule. In other words, any notions about democratic decision-making relative to what we eat are moot, at least if the corporations and their political allies have their way.

Secondly, there are many questions raised--primarily outside of the United States and in the public domain--about the efficacy and safety of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the food supply (There is also probably more opposition to GMOs in the United States than is generally recognized, primarily because movements in the U.S. are often media driven. In the case of GMOs there is scant media attention paid to the issue. Consequently in the United States GMOs are proliferating in various ingredients and in the food supply without the benefit of labeling, which, as stated above, is vigorously opposed by the corporate food purveyors³⁶.

A major concern is the safety of GMOs in the food supply, particularly as they relate to allergic reactions and drug interactions such as the decreasing effectiveness of antibiotics. Environmental concerns also abound principally with respect to the capacity of GMOs to cross-pollinate with non - GMO crops and the resultant contamination of the latter. This is an especially serious concern for organic farmers. However, even conventional farmers are facing problems. For example, in one particularly galling case in Canada, the manufacturers of GMO seeds successfully sued a farmer for trademark infringement after his fields were contaminated via cross – pollination with GMOs! The farmer in question did not use GMO seed at all on his field but was sued nonetheless for violating the “rights” of the corporation. This incident demonstrates part of the core GMO dilemma--namely the veracity of the research done in the biotech arena. In this case, what is called into question is the word of researchers for the manufacturers of GMOs that the crops posed no threat to non - GMO operations through cross contamination-- a finding that is proving to be a fairly commonplace occurrence³⁷.

Cross contamination is problematic because it violates the principles of choice for farmers as we can see in the Schmeiser case. Pollen, which carries the genetic material of a plant, does not recognize boundaries just as pollution does not recognize boundaries. Pollution originating in one location is deposited in other locations. One can imagine many of the scenarios where that occurs. For example, mercury is deposited in oceans, lakes and rivers from industrial activities including burning coal in power plants. The mercury is then moved up the food chain via consumption.

The same scenario holds true for genetic pollution where pollen from GMO farms is spread to neighboring farms or when farm raised salmon escape and spread their genetic code into the wild population creating potential damage to the wild species. In Mexico despite an official moratorium genetic or transgenic contamination has occurred. In essence the laws of nature make it impossible for it not to be cross contamination between transgenic and non-transgenic crops³⁸.

Likewise, recent events in India underscore the problems associated with the intrusion of GMOs and corporations into the agricultural industry for both food and non – food products. In India, the Monsanto corporation was successful at getting about 2% of it's' cotton farmers to use GMO seeds. The outcome has proved to be problematic because there are concerns about the long-term impact of the GMO seeds on pesticide use. It appears that genetically modified crops are not necessarily a solution to pest attacks, in the short term they reduce pesticide use but the long term impacts is far from clear. The reason is because pests will, become more active and resistant to GMOs. Bill Ayres reports in WorldWatch magazine (July/August 2003) that this has already happening with weeds as Roundup produced by Monsanto and the herbicide to be used with genetically modified seed “has triggered an evolutionary backlash”. This of course will create the scenario of heavy pesticide use, which the new GMO seed was supposed to end. Furthermore the genetically modified crop has limited market appeal as much of it is rejected because the fibers are shorter that those of the conventional crop. This compounded by the fact that the genetically modified seed costs about four times as much as regular seed. Lower market desirability plus a much greater cost for seed does not make the agricultural sector very promising for farmers. If you add to that the prospect that genetically modified crops in the long term may increase pesticide use that means that farmers will spend more money on pesticides, thus raising the overall cost of agriculture. The future for industrial, biotech driven agriculture looks ominous and is obviously unsustainable.

The advocates of biotechnology in the agricultural sector faced another impediment to their incursion into India when approval for planting GMO mustard seed was rejected. The principal reason cited for denying authorization was concern about potential adverse health effects. The decision had political and cultural implications as well, because mustard seed is the primary source for cooking oil in large portions of India, and women--the primary food preparers--did not want the seed stock for their oil to come from genetically modified sources³⁹.

A recent article in *The Ecologist* cleverly entitled “Eat Shit or Die: America Gives Africa a Choice” cites how the Bush administration is miffed because African countries are rejecting US food aid ⁴⁰80% of the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) budget for food aid goes to US firms who frequently send food aid from genetically modified crops, which are later rejected. The interesting part, however, is that if the USAID were to give the southern African nations like Zimbabwe and Zambia monetary grants, they could purchase non – GMO maize on the international market. The food aid needs peak at about 2 million tons for southern Africa, of which African countries could supply approximately 1.2 million tons. The revenue for these potential food aid purchases would as stated in the article “both cure the problem of starvation and give a boost to the economies of African countries”. This source of revenue could

then be used to support HIV prevention efforts or renewable energy supplies such as photovoltaic panels for rural electrification programs. Instead, the contracts go to US firms and support their GMO programs to the detriment of African economies. African countries are then taken to task with rhetoric, which is akin to the saying, “beggars can’t be choosers”. This situation is inherently and profoundly unjust, and provides another instance of how important food and agriculture are in the context of environmental, social and economic justice⁴¹.

I would be remiss at this point if I did not reiterate that conventional, industrial agricultural practices are a serious problem to the environment and public health. Genetically modified organisms and biotechnology is the latest assault brought to bear on an agricultural systems that has become increasingly industrial in it’s’ approach and techniques especially over the last 50 years. This article is indeed biased in favor of ecological and organic agricultural strategies; limiting the use of chemical inputs to the greatest extent possible if they cannot be eliminated completely⁴².

Becoming Solution Oriented: Moving Beyond Environmental Justice

But not so fast. There are grassroots, people and ecologically oriented solutions that will require advocacy, creativity and financing. It will also require a tremendous outreach-- a marketing effort aimed primarily at giving people choices.

While there may be opposition to the corporate model of food production, it must be countered by access to choices. The corporate world acquiesces to one thing- - market pressure. This advocate/activist is bold and daring enough however to propose a whole systems approach to managing our food system from production to consumption. That will amount to a rejection of corporate control over our food and agricultural systems⁴³.

This bold move will require the resources of a coalition of groups and organizations within the environmental, social and economic justice movements. This is a strategy that will have to be adopted if these movements are to become more sophisticated and if they are to achieve truly meaningful social and policy changes that will insure a sustainable future.

In the rest of this chapter I present a modest proposal for such a project. The reader will be able to deduce the reason(s) from this brief overview, why a coalition of groups and organizations will be necessary to achieve the desired results: a just, equitable and secure food system that has broad implications locally, regionally, nationally and globally.

Sustainable and Just Food Systems: A Proposed Model

An ecological and human oriented integrated agricultural system will be at its core urban and rural and to the greatest extent possible, organic. (The scale of the individual agricultural operations of such a system should be small to medium sized and have a regional and local market focus⁴⁴. The scale and the relationship of ecologically based agriculture is an important feature because of the proliferation of mega-agribusiness corporations into the “organic” business. While they don’t use pesticides, etc they leave a lot to be desired from particularly in terms of market share essentially functioning the same as conventional agribusinesses by squeezing out the smaller players. So for example, Horizon a Colorado company control 70% of the “organic” dairy market while over processing milk (ultra pasteurized) supplied from cows that while fed organic grains they are locked in lots without being allowed to roam around doing cow things like eating grass. Without dealing with the controversy surrounding whether human should consume cows milk or not which would you prefer – “organic” milk from a cow walking around eating grass and being treated well by a small, local farmer or “organic” milk from a cow confined and essentially reduced to a mechanical milk machine with fur and udders on one several “factory farm” with thousands of cows for shipment all over the U.S.? The fact that “organic” food has been co-opted to such a large degree is not surprising when you realize that the organic niche is the fastest growing food sector now being worth more than \$10 billion with an annual growth rate of 20 percent⁴⁵. The big boys see a cash cow not a principled way of life that protects the ecosystem and the humans that work in the fields. Small and medium sized farmers that have formed the backbone of an organic alternative to industrial agriculture deserve the support of local and regional markets that consciously buy their products and help to insure their survival. Strong support of small and medium sized operations also provide a potential source of income for new farmers and young people with agriculture backgrounds that see no future in continuing the farm life of past generations because of dwindling income.

Elements of the proposed system of agriculture would, for example foster the reestablishment and proliferation of family farms. New farm families would be developed from several sources including immigrant farmers, agricultural students from regional or special programs established to develop new farmers as well as those urban dwellers that may be compelled to return to a more rural lifestyle. This element of the proposal would incorporate a program that would function as the equivalent of a domestic agricultural Peace Corp (Ag Corp or perhaps Food Corp?) where farmers and farm workers would be trained and then assigned to various regions of the country to establish farms (urban and rural), primarily for the production of food crops. I have engaged in recent discussions with advocates about the prospects of “re-colonizing” rural counties that are economically distressed, for the purpose of establishing an

organic/biodynamic/ecological agricultural system that produces food for a chain of community-based grocery stores, ethnic markets, restaurants and the like.

Methods exist for extending the growing season and dramatically increasing the amount of production crops grown locally in both urban and rural communities. The growing seasons would be extended through the use of greenhouses, which could be located in urban and rural communities. The outcome would be locally grown produce and animal products. The system would be just that; a *system* with distribution, wholesale and retail links with most of links in the chain between the farmer and the producers being removed. This will allow the farmers (and farm workers) to realize a much larger share of the food dollar than the current system (which favors the brokers, wholesalers and retailers) allows.

At the wholesale and retail levels of the system community-based outlets would be established that deal directly with the farmers – urban and rural.

The urban links in the system would utilize a variety of formats in the overall system, such as large-scale hydroponic operations and rooftop greenhouses, as well as more traditional gardens.

In Chicago, there is one such project that deserves examination. It is a sustainable urban agricultural project led by the Institute for Community Resource Development (ICRD), under the direction of Tracy and LaDonna Redmond. The project is organized in the West Garfield Park/Austin community areas of Chicago. The combined population of the community areas is 140,546 (W.Garfield-23,019 and Austin-140,546). Blacks make up about 96.6%, whites about 2.8%, with the remaining 0.6% consisting of a small population of Latinos and Asians⁴⁶. The overwhelmingly Black community in the area has been and continues to be plagued by a number of environmental justice problems the most notable of which was the Northwest Incinerator. The incinerator was owned by the City of Chicago and operated in the community until its closure in 1996. The fight to close the facility was led by a coalition of approximately 30 community groups named WASTE⁴⁷. Very close to the site of the now defunct incinerator ICRD is operating their promising urban agriculture project.

The ICRD project utilizes several vacant lots that are held in a land trust as the site for its urban farm. Through foundation grants the ICRD has been able to test the quality of the soil in the lots (for contaminants), purchase the materials necessary for building raised garden beds (though no contaminants were found it was decided that the top layer of soil would be removed and replaced with raised beds as a precautionary strategy), and bring in fresh soil and compost. The organization was then able to hire residents in the community to work on the project in various capacities. Several varieties of vegetables are cultivated and then sold at a produce stand now located in a stall sited in a renovated building near the Garfield Park Conservatory. The Conservatory and produce stand is on property owned by the Chicago Park District and provide to shop owners at

affordable rates. In addition to the produce stand there are shops such as a garden center, purveyors of ethnic clothing and artifacts as well as art galleries and dealers. All produce is grown according to biodynamic and ecological agricultural principles. In the future the ICRD will establish a produce stand in the community, which will allow them to sell vegetables everyday from their plots as well as products from farms in the region. Furthermore, the ICRD is currently establishing a food cooperative, which will serve some housing, coops as well as members from the community.

This project is significant in that it provides visions of potential community and economic development strategies in communities. A broader implication is that the organization is establishing the notion of the importance of food to the development of health and sustainable communities. The first of many steps to bring displaced African communities quality food have been taken with this project. The project serves as a prelude to establishing food security and food access as the centerpiece of sustainable economic development and grassroots local entrepreneurial activity⁴⁸.

Similarly, the Center for Urban Transformation (CUT), a community development organization whose mission is informed by the Principles of Environmental Justice, has a strategy for solving the crisis of food access in inner city communities. The CUT is developing will foster the development of small, community scale, full service natural foods grocery stores in the community. The stores will serve not just as grocery outlets, but also as food activity centers where community members will be offered nutrition and cooking classes and be able to participate in activities such as yoga, tai chi and receive complementary medicine therapies such as acupuncture and massage therapy.

The store(s) will give priority to local and regional produce, poultry and meat. All products will be certified organic or come from farmers with whom the CUT has relationships. Many farmers utilize practices that are ecologically sound and human oriented, but they may not be “certified organic” and those farmers should be rewarded, not penalized. Price points for organic produce are higher than those for conventional crops. One of the reasons is that organic agriculture is more labor intensive compared to conventional agriculture thus the need for organic farmers to require higher prices for their produce. Transitional crops while requiring the same intensive labor can’t command the same price points because in the pantheon of production agriculture while transitional crops are grown utilizing the same techniques as organic they can’t command the same price points as certified organic produce. Therefore there is no incentive for farmers to transition to organic practices. Support from the retail and the consumer sector will encourage more farmers to transition to organic techniques. Profit margins in agriculture are small and some farmers can not afford certification fees or perhaps they do not have the capacity to undertake the considerable administrative tasks required for certification. Likewise the grocery store will offer a market to farmers that produce transitional crops⁴⁹.

Another program area for the planned grocery store(s) is that of giving priority to produce grown within the foodshed.”

A foodshed is a term coined as early as 1929 to describe the flow of food from the area where it is grown into the place where it is consumed. For this article and as an instrument for further discussion a foodshed may be described, as the areas from which a food can come that are ecologically sustainable. The foodshed is local and regional at its core, at time it may be appropriate to venture outside of the region for certain food items. Seasonal approaches to eating will assist in making a food system a more regional entity, while strategies are designed and implemented to expand the growing season. This will increase the amount of food that can be grown in the temperate regions of the Midwest and Northeast again reducing the need for food grown outside of the region. Benefits such as regional capital investment in farms and other food related businesses, local job creation, fair trade, strong community institutions and direct democratic participation in the local food economy will accrue from the development of a local and regional food system that operates based upon the framework of a food shed⁴⁹.

The quickest way to envision the conceptual model of the foodshed that will be applied to this effort is to locate Chicago on a map of the United States and then give priority to food that is produced as close to Chicago as possible. An example would be giving priority to melons from South Carolina or Citrus from Texas rather than either of those items from California or Mexico. Again optimally the highest priority would be given to food produce close to Chicago such as apples from Michigan rather than from Washington State⁵⁰.

Special priority will also be given to produce from agricultural cooperatives and small and medium sized producers throughout the Americas, particularly from the Caribbean basin, Mexico and Central America. Fair Trade items will also become special priority items in the CUT grocery stores⁵¹.

The CUT is committed to a model that will seek foundation support as seed capital for planning and launching the grocery store operations. Foundation support will allow the CUT to form beneficial relationships with institutions such as universities to develop a business plan, designing accounting systems, etc. The money could be used to pay internships for senior level undergraduate and graduate students to perform these types of tasks.

The CUT will then depend upon the financial success of the grocery stores as the source of sustainable income to maintain the operations. This is critical because rather than being beholden to stockholders the operations can instead focus on providing livable wages to the employees and plowing surplus revenue or profits back into operations such as expanding into a chain of community-based natural food grocery stores.

In addition, the CUT grocery operations will also provide distribution and wholesale services to restaurants, schools and other community-based institutions interested in using and promoting healthy products to their clientele.

This plan is the outgrowth of our research and the important work of an organization such as ICRD to provide access to quality food for underserved (though not necessarily poor) communities. The underlying goal in this activity beyond economic development, environmental, social or economic justice is the creation of a much healthier community whether they are the elders or infants. The importance of food in the overall health status of any community cannot be overstated. If anything it should be repeated time and time again until the message is coupled with a real grassroots effort to design and establish the institutional framework for food access and security to emerge.

The Politics of Health and Nutrition

If the United States is serious about health care and the current health care crisis, much of which is related to food and nutrition, then this kind of approach will be a critical link in the system.

Elected officials are fond of talking about health insurance or lack thereof, but we can not have a relevant discussion about community and public health without looking at the role that food and adequate nutrition plays in the overall health of community members. It seems to this activist/researcher that preventive health strategies that focus on diet and nutrition are critical to curbing runaway health care costs and the lack of health care coverage for a number of citizens, many of whom work everyday and are swelling the ranks of the working poor. Even many entrepreneurs and community activists working in the community can not afford health insurance.

Nutrition and food access are not a replacement for health insurance coverage or any other public health issues in the United States; they are however an adjunct to developing comprehensive strategies for healthy communities.

The role of several institutional entities in the design and implementation of sustainable food systems is critical. Some of the most important institutions include, but not limited to, the following:

Foundations: Foundations are needed to provide seed funding for various elements of food system projects such as land acquisition (urban and rural), training programs, infrastructure, equipment, seeds, research protocols, etc. Foundations will be asked to fund development programs based upon research and entrepreneurship rather than social service and charity. It's not that charity and social service are not part of creating healthy communities, but the creation of business and employment opportunities that are not

exploitative and far reaching are even more important in optimal human development for our communities. Foundations such as the Chicago Community Trust and the Kellogg Foundation have played a pivotal role in the work of the ICRD.

Universities: Campus and off campus facilities would be designed and implemented to assist in various aspects of the system. It should be noted that many of the major land grant institutions might not be part of the institutional framework because of conflicts with the work done for the biotech and conventional agricultural system. Smaller public and private institutions may form the backbone of this element of the project. Another potential institutional partner could be historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU), which have a rich history of training Black farmers. In Chicago the Kellogg Foundation has provided multi-year support for a community-university partnership. The primary universities working with ICRD are Chicago State University and Loyola (Chicago) University. The University of Illinois Extension Service, The University of Illinois-Chicago and DePaul University have also played a role in the project.

Non-academic training programs are also a critical component to the strategy forming a level of training for current farmers who are interested in converting to some form of organic agriculture and/or to production crops and those individuals and families that may be interested in a career change or exchanging urban life for a rural existence. This sector of the educational effort will be formed from a network of regional centers that may or may not be associated with an educational institution⁵².)

Universities form an important research function, particularly as it relates to the development of research protocols and providing technical assistance on various elements of an emerging urban agricultural system. For example, the creation of an organic hydroponic network in cities will require some solid research and development leading to system creation. It is clear that hydroponic operations can be organic as demonstrated through our research, but more work needs to be done.

Government: At all levels of government (municipal, county, state and federal) there must be some assistance to the development of the system outlined above. If government can provide assistance to corporations and other special interest groups it can surely provide assistance for the creation of a system that provides access to food for the communities that generate revenue through the payment of taxes and fees and that utilizes practices and techniques that protect the environment and provide employment opportunities to

thousands of people nationally. Equity in this realm necessitates communities receiving a return on the revenue that they have produced to support community-based (local and regional) initiatives such as farms (urban and rural), grocery stores and other food related businesses. . The Bethel New Life (BNL) organization also in Chicago offers an example of how government can work with communities to create progressive commercial operations in communities. BNL is receiving substantial funding of \$4.5 million dollars from a combination of local, state and federal sources for a 23,000 square foot “smart, green” building that will house a child and infant daycare center, employment services and 5 storefronts. The building will utilize photovoltaic cells (for solar energy) a green living roof and energy efficient windows and other energy efficiencies that it is estimated will cut energy operating costs in half. Funding and/or technical assistance will come from government institutions such as the City of Chicago Empowerment Zone and Department of Environment, State of Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the United States Department of Energy’s Argonne National Laboratory. When the building is completed it should provide about 70 jobs for local residents while doing so in a structure that is part of the next generation of commercial (and residential) buildings.

Assistance can be provided in the form of tax incentives, grants, infrastructure construction and improvements and other forms of technical assistance. Advocacy and activism will no doubt play a major role in getting government to respond in a positive and meaningful way to the development of a fair, equitable and ecologically sustainable food system. There will no doubt be difficulties again given government’s relationship with and acquiescence to corporate interests, which will with certainty oppose many elements of the program we have only briefly outlined. A major campaign to support this kind of a development program will probably have to be undertaken.

The underpinning of the campaign must be the return of revenue dollars to communities for community-based efforts in urban and rural communities. The right to food choices must also be reiterated; corporations must not be able to dictate what we eat and who has fair and equitable access to the health and life giving properties of high quality food.

Brownfield redevelopment in urban centers is one example of what government can provide assistance for, by providing space for large-scale operations in urban communities and providing funding for cleanup of contaminated sites. Brownfield sites could be utilized

after cleanup for greenhouse and hydroponic projects rather than agricultural fields eliminating any possibility contamination to the food supply by inadequate remediation. Greenhouse projects located near landfills could utilize potential energy sources such as methane that is otherwise burned off to heat massive greenhouse structures that could, for example, be a place to produce seed starts for agricultural and ornamental plants⁵³.

Nongovernmental Organizations: NGOs and/or nonprofit organizations are, of course, pivotal in the organization of a widespread food ecosystem that will provide food security and vastly improve the prospects for healthy communities while providing employment opportunities with living wages and safe conditions for the entire workforce required for the operation of such a vast and complex operation. Organizations that focus on various issues will be required to become partners in a coalition of institutions and organizations to facilitate meaningful social and policy changes.

Organizations such as the American Farmland Trust would be utilized to save farmlands from the “developers” and other proponents of sprawl. They would then work in coalition with for example the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, a Wisconsin based education and research organization and similar organizations such as the Organic Farming Research Foundation, and programs such as the Center for Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems at the University of California Santa Cruz or the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University that are committed to ecological agricultural sustainability and practices. Provisions must also be made for establishing similar programs for urban agricultural programs regardless of the methods (i.e., hydroponics, urban farms, etc.) utilized in the urban milieu.

Farm cooperatives and consumer outlets such as food cooperatives, natural foods groceries and even larger chain grocers are important elements in the process of developing an ecologically and human oriented food ecosystem. Farm cooperatives could work directly with food cooperatives, natural foods grocers and distributors to provide a range of food items that coop members and conscientious consumer’s desire. Similarly the cooperatives would work directly with natural foods grocers to provide a variety of food items. All of this could be linked by community – based distribution and warehouse operations that serve the network of community – based grocery stores and food coops. A wonderful example of the potential for these kinds of relationships to develop

can be found in Virginia. The nonprofit organization, Appalachian Sustainable Development in a project created to assist tobacco farmers to convert to other crops formed a group of farmers that grow a variety of organic produce. The organization markets their products under their label, Appalachian Harvest. The group began marketing their produce in a local grocery chain named Food City. The project now has 40 participating farmers while marketing and selling their products in stores and restaurants throughout Virginia, North Carolina, Washington, DC and as far away as Philadelphia⁵⁴.

In Massachusetts, the nonprofit Red Tomato provides opportunities for small farmers to market their produce to stores in the Northeast. With assistance from Oxfam the Red Tomato supported African-American farmers from the Federation of Southern Cooperatives encouraging them to add seedless watermelons to their product line. The Red Tomato provided technical assistance for marketing resulting in the Cooperative being able to sell 13 truckloads of watermelons to Stop & Shop stores while earning \$67,000.00. Learning to market also realized the sale of 130 truckloads of watermelons for a gain of \$450,000.00. The watermelons in the northeast market served as a bridge for fresh top-quality watermelons until the local and regional crop was ready. In all the smaller farmers that are left out of the markets monopolized by large agribusiness were able to make a profit and serve satisfied consumers.

Here in the Midwest many farmers need to shift from crops such as soybeans and corn in order to stay profitable and to escape the current system of sharecropping where farmers are tied to the price structures and whims of the corporate agriculture mainstream. That mainstream and the food it manufactures lacks crop diversity and devoid of taste and nutritional value⁵⁵. Efforts like those mentioned above provide excellent opportunities for small and medium sized farmers in the Midwest as well as farmers in other regions that have also been squeezed out of the market to be able to provide produce during gaps in the Midwest growing seasons.

Nonprofit organizations with the mission of providing a plethora of management and organizational technical assistance would be utilized for assisting a variety of organizations enhance their capacity to do the work.

Coalition and capacity building are critical to assuring the security and safety of our food supply. Alternative systems require interlinked strategies and commitments just like mainstream institutions. Automobile companies have relationships with parts,

vendors, governmental agencies and financial institutions and the like. Why shouldn't a food ecosystem that provides a secure and safe food supply not have institutional partners that make the entire system work? Activists and advocates must begin to undertake very seriously, policy and institutional development strategies if they are to be truly effective.

Financial and Investment Institutions: Let's be frank, honest and to the point right up front: Mainstream financial institutions have little or no interest in bucking the interlocking system of which they partner with the industrial agricultural and food barons. Who will assist in funding or financing the various elements of our food ecosystem? Citibank or some other corporate entity? How will you invest in core companies within the system?

We must address all of these questions earnestly. Let me rephrase that. We must develop a sustainable financial plan and financial institutions to provide the capital assistance required to purchase of land, to manufacture and purchase equipment, to design and build farm buildings, and develop transportation and distribution centers and the like.

The "movement" (specifically the environmental, economic and social justice movements) in its various manifestations must become mature and develop a way to materialize what it says it wants. Do we want an economy that relies on renewable energy or fossil fuels? Do we want to reduce if not eliminate the waste trade or do we want more landfills and incinerators targeted for any community but in particularly communities of color? How can we not question the system that produces our food? Do we as a movement not advocate agricultural production that protects human and environmental health? I think not, it would be unconscionable not to advocate a food system that is secure and that operates in an environmentally, economically and socially responsible way. It is indeed time for the environmental as well as the social and economic justice movement to think and operate in a strategic manner that is comprehensive and that propels the movement to the next level. The next level will set the stage for a fundamental and profound change in human interaction and our relationship to the ecosystems that we are all wholly dependent upon for our very existence.

I'm saying very succinctly that hey y'all we've got to put our money where our mouth is. It is imperative that we find or formulate the expertise required to create community development credit unions and development banks, which will provide the financial backing for

family farms, community based natural foods grocery stores, and other components of sustainable food systems⁵⁶. Then we have to buy and invest in locally grown produce, bread baked in local bakeries and in small community based grocery stores. We can not design and proliferate the urban agricultural systems that will be heavily dependent upon greenhouses, hydroponics and land purchases without a capital investment strategy.

The activist/advocacy community often loathes the thought of seeking support from business leaders. This distaste is not unwarranted, but the “movement” must begin to understand and operate from a position that a business culture can be created that is indeed palatable. It will be palatable if it does not exploit workers, destroy the environment, encourage slavery and is ecologically sustainable. This is not idealism or utopianism. We have no choice and we must succeed if there is going to be a sustainable world for the generations to come. Current patterns of food production as well as other vitally important systems required for **basic** human needs are unsustainable in spite of the media productions and public relations dog and pony shows that we see on television or in mainstream print media advertising and articles. Greenwashing is alive and well and provides cover for a variety of practices that are not sustainable. In these “modern” times the wisdom of the ancients and of nature itself must be the foundation of all of our activities if we are to survive as a species in the long term. All of this must be taken into consideration as we forge a financial system that invests in that future. As individuals, families and organizations we must bank with financial institutions that support our beliefs and we must invest in social investing programs that do likewise. We must become sophisticated in our interactions with the machinations of globalism and corporate governance whether it is related to food, energy or housing. Our future and the future of the other sentient beings with which we share the planet depend upon a shift in our financial behavior.

There can be no environmental justice without economic or social justice. The environmental justice movement will have no credibility until it addresses clearly how we contribute to and thus solve the problems of environmental, social and economic injustice in **all** communities, not just in the one we live in. If you don't want to suffer environmental injustice then don't buy into or participate in those phenomena that contribute to it. An ecologically sustainable and multifaceted agricultural system if it is to emerge has to be rooted in a “multicultural sustainable agriculture movement that includes the knowledge of those that have been

subjugated and dispossessed (racial and ethnic minorities, women, farmworkers, consumers, poor communities, Third World peasants) ⁵⁷. This will form a framework that will re-establish our links to nature, and recover and retain the knowledge of farming by Africans brought to the Americas as well as that of other “indigenous people”⁵⁸. Perhaps in an era of alienation characterized by many of the problems seen in urban communities African-American families may be encouraged to return to the land in a new multicultural agricultural system to produce food for urban communities reversing the alienation from the land and agriculture that has occurred.

People of African descent have experienced a loss of land that makes them essentially a “landless” people. An article appearing in a June 1985 article entitled “The Disappearing Black Farmer” indicates that from a 1920 figure of 926,000 Black farmers owning 15 million acres of land by 1978 there did 57,000 Black farmers own a total of about 4.5 million acres of land. 1997 figures indicate that there were 18,451 Black farmers in the United States (compared to 1,882,652 white farmers). 93% of Black farms were in 15 southern states and significantly the states with the weakest tradition of slavery and plantation agriculture (Florida, Texas and Oklahoma) experienced the smallest declines between 1982 and 1997. Texas which has the largest number of Black farmers experienced an increase in Black farmers, making it the only state not to experience a decline. Black farms totaled approximately 2,080,112 acres in 1997 ⁵⁹.

The problems that have plagued Black farmers such as the lack of access to capital, the indifference and downright complicity in the loss of land by governmental agencies remain. Institutional and policy must be implemented and changed to provide the economic and social justice necessary to make farming an attractive alternative to the fluctuations in the job market suffered by indigenous people, that have been removed from our historical and cultural relationships to the land for far to long. Others have a more recent experience of displacement such as immigrants from Mexico and Central America that have been removed from the land by industrial and corporate agricultural conglomerates putting at risk ancient indigenous agricultural systems. Many of these immigrants may now be found hard at work in some restaurant kitchen or dirty factory job, knowledge withering on the vine.

Now we are all part of the labor pool, competing with each other for our souls in metropolitan areas across the U.S. in clusters of underemployment and unemployment wanting desperately to be found “qualified” and bestowed the gift of a job. What we need is life giving and affirming institutions; the environmental, social and economic justice movement’s call for jobs isn’t enough. Rather healthy communities where

people are free from toxic exposures through their food, the air, the water or the land is what the struggle is truly all about.

Food and farming offer a unifying point for a movement that is multicultural, anti-racist, and anti-sexist and that embraces all aspects of the environmental justice movement. What else can advocate worker protection, land and water conservation, pollution prevention, public health and urban-rural connections the way food and farming can. All of these elements and more that form the issues of the environmental justice movement crystallize around food and farming, making it an area of human activity that all advocates and activist working on behalf of environmental, social and economic justice should readily support.

As stated above and worth mentioning again is the need for supporting a creatively disengaged alternative to the industrial agricultural system through the development of financial institutions actively engaged in social investing that would embrace the plight of the small and medium farmers. A financial system of this type is needed capitalize the purchase of land, equipment, seed training and technical assistance for the small and medium sized farmers that are providing food (and fibers) for socially conscious grocers and their customers. This financial entity would also promote and capitalize the entry of new farmers and the re-entry of those interested in returning to farming. The return on investment dollars may be small but the environmental, social and economic benefit of this type would be huge. There are approximately 55 million married couples in the U.S. if only 25% of those family units contributed on average \$100 annually to a social investment fund earmarked for land, equipment, distribution centers and natural food grocers the fund would have access to \$1.375 billion dollars annually. If the fund is tax deductible contributors could write off \$100 per year on their income tax while investing in a system that would employ hundreds of people and provide many more with a safe source of high quality, nutritious food from farmers that are stewards of the land. A social investment of this type would cost a family on average \$8.33 per month. I can think of a lot of things that a family could do without like a latte or two or maybe a lottery ticket that would give them the \$8.33 to invest in a healthy food system and environment. What if churches, temples and synagogues would take up one extra collection per month of one dollar for the fund? - That would add a few million dollars to the campaign. In fact that is just what I am proposing a national social investment campaign for a sustainable food system that would capitalize all elements of a food system for all elements of the system from farmers to grocers that adhere to the principle of environmental, social and economic justice.

That is what is meant by “beyond environmental justice,” and that is why we must become mature and sophisticated as a movement and as a

human community. Therefore, if you choose to drink coffee, then buy fair trade, ecologically sustainable coffee; if you eat chicken, then purchase it from small, local producers, not the factory poultry farms that create needless pain and suffering and ecological devastation. I think you get the message.

Conclusion

The broad elements of the agriculture and food that were touched upon so briefly in this article are linked together by food's utter importance to human health and life. More importantly though is agriculture and by extension the relationship of food to the environment. The impact that in particular industrial agriculture has on the environment is profound. This is true with respect to issues such as soil erosion and loss, pollution, habitat destruction and biotechnology. A system that has such a monumental impact on the ecosystems crucial to life must be examined critically and reinvented in ways that protect the sacred gift of life that we have been given. As stewards of the land and justice we are also bound to protect all sentient beings and thus the environment. Agriculture and how it is executed is without a doubt among the most important issues of our time. As activist for environmental, social and economic justice and as well as a socially engaged Buddhist practitioner I am bound to advocate on behalf of all things sentient and non-sentient. As such agriculture and food because of its' essential nature is where I am concentrating my efforts as an activist and socially and environmentally responsible entrepreneur.

This article is dedicated to human rights, sustainable agriculture, food, health and the Oneness of all things.