

## Race and the Food System Themes 2011

### General questions:

1. What does it mean to you and your community to dismantle racism through the food system?
2. What would the world look like without an imbalance of power and privilege?

### Themes:

1. **International, migrant labor:** The US imports a significant amount of its food from other countries, including organics. Consequently, our food and money habits, as well as government regulations, have an international impact. Migrant farm workers, who are often undocumented workers from Latin America, have been garnering more media coverage about the racism, unjust work environments, poverty, and violence they experience. Their plight is one of many caused by the US' policies.
  - a. What are some long-term, international impacts of the US's food system?
  - b. How does racism veil the true cost of food production by criminalizing undocumented workers in the US?
  - c. What are some examples of farm labor organizing (in the US and internationally) that you consider good models for economic and food justice movements? Please explain why.
2. **Indigenous knowledges and rights, decolonization:** The United States exists only because lives, land, and culture were taken from the indigenous peoples who prospered here long before Europeans arrived. Indigenous peoples continue to live, struggle, and thrive in the US. Indigenous knowledges and rights, as well as decolonization, need to be brought to the forefront of the US food movement.
  - . How can we decolonize our minds, communities, government, and society?

- a. How do you respect the land you farm? How do you respect the people who preceded you on that land?
  - b. How is the US-Mexico border created, maintained, and made to seem natural at the expense of indigenous peoples?
3. **Whitewashing and greenwashing:** Whitewashing is one way of describing the complex, multifaceted process in which white culture co-opts other cultures. One example is when white culture popularizes a culturally significant item/idea from a different culture by stripping it of its meaning and reducing it to aesthetics, such as Native American war bonnets that are now mass-produced by costume stores. Greenwashing is the process in which companies market their products as “eco-friendly,” when they do not actually address environmental sustainability. For example, companies say they are “reducing environmental impact,” when they are actually just cutting costs by printing two-sided.
  - . How are whitewashing and greenwashing related?
    - a. Why do whitewashing and greenwashing occur?
    - b. How do you bring visibility to the history of whitewashing and greenwashing?
4. **Spirituality:** Broadly defined, spirituality is whatever makes you “whole,” what nourishes you and enables you to move through the world in a positive way. Spirituality is often ignored by the mainstream food movement, though it provides nourishment for communities and organizations.
  - . How are farming, cooking, and eating spiritual acts for you? How do these three acts fit into your broader spirituality?
    - a. How does food heal the body, mind and spirit?
    - b. How do food, spirit, and culture mutually reinforce each other?
5. **Youth-led activism, youth of color:** The voices of young people, particularly young people of color, are not often heard within social justice movements, in spite of the fact that they have unique perspectives and ideas, influence over their peers, and energy. Youth all over the world voice their opinions on policies that directly affect their lives in creative and impactful ways.

- . Why is it important for youth, especially youth of color, to be involved in the food movement?
  - a. What are youth's priorities for the movement?
  - b. How are youth today taking action against racism and food insecurity?
- 6. **Race and gender:** Race and gender, as systems of oppression, intersect in a myriad of ways. These intersections, take together with food justice, produce a wealth of stories of survival, power building, spirituality, pain, culture, family, and growth.
  - . What are some historical ways in which women of color are sexualized within food systems? In what ways does this continue today?
    - a. How are women of color in particular affected by the current, unjust food system?
    - b. How is violence in the food system (like animal cruelty and unsafe working conditions) related to domestic violence, war, and rape?
- 7. **Medicalization and pathologization of bodies of color:** White culture often treats people who do not conform to its expectations (people of color, women, LGBTQ people, differently-abled people, etc.) like Others who need to be studied. This has the effect of pathologizing them - which means turning human conditions into medical conditions and problems. It takes away authority from individuals and communities and gives it to "health professionals," who are often white and do not belong to the communities with the "problem." These professionals then have the power to impose the biases of white society and suppress traditional healing.
  - . What are some examples of white institutions studying, dissecting, and analyzing bodies of color?
    - a. How do these examples often show the white body as "healthy, natural, etc." and the body of color as "obese, abnormal, etc"?
    - b. How do you build empowering images of bodies of color within your community, popular culture, etc.?
- 8. **Arts - visual, audio, tactile, etc.:** We all benefit immeasurably from art: it soothes our hearts and challenges our minds in ways we cannot quantify. Art is activism that

can send its message across boundaries of race, gender, language, culture, age, and many more. It is also a deeply personal process, one that can help us heal. And because of both of these characteristics, art can also help us build communities and build power for social justice.

- . How do your art, food system work, and racial justice work influence each other?
  - a. How do you incorporate art into your food systems work, including work with youth, communities, people who are differently-abled, etc?
  - b. How do you use the media to promote food and racial justice?
- 9. **Liberal vs radical activism:** Liberal activism is defined as working within an institution to change it from the inside out, such as running for Congress so you can influence food safety laws. Radical activists generally create change by rejecting broken institutions and starting new ones, such as starting food co-operatives rather than trying to get a large grocery chain to carry locally-grown foods. Though seemingly oppositional, these tactics coexist within organizations and movements.
  - . In your work, do you usually utilize liberal or radical activist tactics? How does your work combine the two?
    - a. How do you both support and critique activists who take a different approach than yours to dismantling racism within the food system?
    - b. What are some individuals or organizations that you consider good models for racial and food justice movements? Please explain why.
- 10. **Alliance and relationship building:** Though everyone has a different approach to creating a more just world, it is important that we work together regardless of differences. Internal disputes can disrupt the momentum of a movement, ultimately limiting how effective it can be. However, without internal challenges, a movement becomes undemocratic and cannot learn from its mistakes.
  - . What organizations and movements are your strategic allies? How do you maintain those relationships?
    - a. As a person of color, how do you support yourself when working with white-led food justice

organizations? - OR - As a white person, how do you remain accountable to people of color communities when doing your work?

- b. How do you foster *collaboration* with peers (individuals and organizations) rather than *competition*?

11. **Creating an inclusive, critical pedagogy:** Critical pedagogy involves restructuring how we teach and how we learn, with the goal of promoting consciousness raising and activism. It breaks down the hierarchy of the teacher-student so that both are valued for their experiences and knowledge. It stipulates that there is no "neutral" way of teaching or learning, but that those experiences are raced, classed, gendered, etc. Consequently, critical pedagogy can be a useful tool in social justice struggles, particularly dismantling racism, to create an inclusive way of organizing.

- . How do you strive towards inclusivity, democracy, and justice within your organization?
  - a. How do you keep yourself accountable to the people you work with/for?
  - b. How do you build on intersectionality to strengthen your work?

12. **Food and queerness, heteronormativity:** Heteronormativity is the institutional bias in favor of opposite-sex relationships, and against same-sex relationships that assumes the former to be "normal" and thus "good," and the latter is "abnormal" and "bad." Queer is commonly used as an umbrella term for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) people, as well as anyone whose sexual and/or gender practices do not conform with society's expectations. Queer also often makes those identities political to resist heteronormativity and push for a more inclusive, just society.

- . In what ways does farming uphold and/or resist traditional gender norms?
  - a. Why is it important to build a food system that is inclusive of all genders and sexualities?

b. How does your sexuality and/or gender identity intersect with your racial/ethnic identity to shape your work?