

Food Policy for Food Justice: # 3 Women of Color & The Fight for Food Justice

2019



"Women, historical creators of knowledge in agriculture and food, continue to produce 80% of food in the poorest countries, are currently the main guardians of biodiversity and crop seeds, being the more affected by neo-liberal and sexist policies."

Nyeleni women statement - Via Campesina

When people think of farmers in the United States, the image that most people have is a man. For the most part this is true, especially with the onset of industrial agriculture, where men operate machines to produce food. However, globally, women dominate food production. According to the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), women produce about 80% of the world's food.

If you think about food preparation and preservation, the image, probably, is of work being done by women. This is also true whether it's preparing meals, baking breads, canning or saving seeds, women are responsible for the majority of these tasks. Isn't it ironic that while the world's women are the most involved with food, they have the least to say in our current food system, which is dominated by large multinational corporations. This system doesn't consider the well being of women in the decisions it makes, especially not the well being of women of color.



Because communities of color experience higher rates of poverty, women of color are forced to make difficult decisions about food with limited income every day. Research shows that the current food system impacts women of color disproportionately with higher rates of heart disease, diabetes, asthma, obesity and other illnesses of under-nutrition. The vicious cycle of poverty and limited access to healthy food is further compounded because communities of color have little or no health insurance.

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Our Kitchen Table believes that only a movement led by women of color can change these injustices. While providing temporary relief, food handouts and food assistance, are not the answer. We need a food system where women of color and communities of color play an intricate role in determining the kind of food they eat, how it is produced and who participates and benefits from that food production.

Organizations like Via Campesina, Navdanya and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers all recognize the vital role that women play in food justice and food sovereignty movements. Our Kitchen Table is committed to playing this same role in West Michigan, empowering women of color to have a voice in determining the kind of food system they want.

We see women of color creating food justice in the following ways:

- **Having real access to healthy and nutritious food** through growing, preserving and preparing their own food. We do this by offering food growing resources and operating neighborhood-based farmers markets.
- **Changing school food policies** to guarantee that their children eat healthy, nutritious meals, made fresh daily. We do this by supporting food growing projects and local schools with students and parents.
- **Sharing knowledge and skills** on food growing, food preparation, seed saving and food preservation. The more women have these skills and share them with each other, the more influence they will have in creating a food justice movement. We do this by hosting forums, workshops and creating educational materials on food justice.
- **Challenging local restaurants** to prepare food that is local, fresh, culturally relevant and does not use exploitative labor, including those who pick the food, prepare the food and serve the food.
- **Demanding that the City of Grand Rapids allow women of color to garden on vacant, city-owned land** for food production in their neighborhoods.



For more information on the food growing and food justice work of Our Kitchen Table, contact us at OKTable1@gmail.com.



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