

Session 12: Faith Communities for Just Food

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Asked participants to consider a time they were around nature, and food, and felt a deep interconnectedness with life and nature.

- As an industrialized nation we've lost a great deal of the connection with nature/land. We don't participate in the process of growing food often. New goals emerging to health the earth, and the damage people have caused, by re-fostering a connection with it.
- Hazon connects people to nature through transformative experiences outside with food.
 - o Farming and environmental education
- For Jewish faith, holiest month of year just passed – Jews reviewing the year and moving forward fresh
 - o Most holidays are agriculture based, but Jewish people have lost the connection (outside of Observant and Orthodox communities)
 - o Mostly “Jews of no religion”
 - o Year ends with Succoth, Feast of Tabernacles – bring the best food, livestock to governance, asking for intercession, for it to be offered up to God to continue throughout the year successfully
 - if one person's crop failed, didn't matter – utilize feast of everyone else. It's enough for everyone. Rain ceremony at the end – beat willow branches on the ground, sounds like rain. Opens the year for new beginnings. Begin the new cycle of reading the Torah for the year, with the story of creation.
- Traditions take people back to “old days,” give larger meaning
- Hazon
 - o started with Nigel Savage
 - o Spiritually-immersive farms for young kids – many start their own programs nationwide
 - o Largest faith-based CSA network in the country – more than 250
 - o Had first food festival in August, had more than 5000 people. Supporting local farmers, forged partnerships.
 - o Working with Oakland Ave. Urban farm, request from 200 people outside of Detroit to support Detroit CSAs - trying to find a way to scale it.

Nurya Love Parish – Cofounder of Plainsong Farm - “Rooted in faith”

Practicing “faith in place” – farm was a call from God

- Had previously been involved in the separate entities (faith and agriculture), with neither co-existing. Wanted to engage both simultaneously.
- Goal: Feed people regardless of faith, or lack thereof.
- Started interest in food systems in 2003 - Sermon on “Grace and Groceries”

- Eating in Place documentary – coopted with Calvin College
- 2013 – Inspired by Soil and Sacrament – book by Fred Bahnson – story of 4 faith-based farms
- Blog: Faith+Farm+Foods
- Drive to maintain “From dust to dust” mentality.
 - Our original relationships are with God and the earth
 - Core ritual of many faiths is a meal
 - Last thing Jesus did before his death – the bread and wine
- Inspired by other programs
 - Seeds of Hope – LA County Episcopal Diocese – combine all their resources into fully integrated food system addressing food and health disparities.
 - Follow planting and harvest calendar so they can distribute food as its needed
 - Johns Hopkins Center for Food and Faith Project
 - Good Food Kit – for churches to evaluate, grow their food system
 - NC Council for Churches – partners for health and wholeness.
 - Conetoe Family life center – started by a pastor who wanted his town to become more self-sufficient. Started as a small farm for nutritional education, now owns more than 20 plots.

Emma Garcia - ACCESS of West Michigan

- ACCESS is a faith-based nonprofit in Grand Rapids – deal with poverty, food insecurity, resourcing congregations
 - Nutrition program (people with chronic illness)
 - Healthy food policy training for orgs.,
 - Help people apply for benefits
 - Farm-to-pantry initiative investing with local farmers.
 - Curriculum on good food systems for orgs.
- Nothing exists currently in the area as far as emergency food charitable organizations.
 - Food pantry in Kent County
- Religious groups typically approach food from an outreach ministry – don’t start with agriculture or growing practices
- Effort to making shift to things that are more dignified than giving out food – congregations weren’t engaged at the start. Suggested community engagement – meals, garden, etc., people didn’t want to listen
- Have to start with theology of faith to understand the importance of dignified food assistance
 - Simon Sinek “Start with Why”

- Kingdom theology – “thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” The kingdom is already here, but we must carry that ethos with us. There is a portion of the kingdom that is yet to come.
- Isaiah 65:17-24
 - Values: connection to the land, blessings, joy and health, togetherness
 - The kingdom gives us vision, to live as were expected to live
- Charitable food
 - First seen during great depression
 - People didn’t want to see them after; reminded them of the past
 - Came back during 70s and 80s – cutbacks from welfare
 - Emergency food model transactional, need-based, relief-oriented (“stop the bleeding”), reactionary (see a need and try to fill it)
 - We follow creative tension model – the problem starts small, once more people hear about it, it grows. The problem creates emotional tension, need to solve the problem
 - What we should be doing is taking the creative license to solve the problem long term rather than stopping the bleeding
 - There’s disparity in the kingdom theology and charitable food
 - Current system has been dehumanizing, reactionary, living by scarcity mentality
- New system being implemented: Asset-based community development
 - Look at assets of neighbors and discuss how to move forward
 - Betterment
 - Empowerment – focusing more on long term outcomes
 - Systemic change
 - Need to line up where the community is with what we want to see happen.
 - Ideal: Growers not exploited, neighbors will eat what they plant and be healthy, food is grown equitably, sustainably.

Questions:

Q: what resources are there to help people make livable wages, but also get people affordable food?

A:

Emma: Look at what is actually behind food insecurity. System has made belief that outputs are the center of everything. We label everyone as dire need. The more we introduce other systems that aren’t pantries, (SNAP, etc.) the less we will see in the pantry system. Companies get tax writeoffs from donating “bad food,” which doesn’t actually solve the problem for vulnerable populations. Must change the system overall.

Nurya: Presbyterian USA offers good resources. Reach out to local branches – some church owned land who could coordinate volunteers to grow food. Do power analysis into communities, talk to people about it. Help support the grassroots efforts.