



*Growing justice.*

# Food Policy for Food Justice

**An OKT Series**



*Healthy Food is a Civil and Human Right!*



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## An OKT Series

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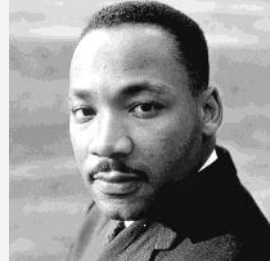
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# 1. What Is Food Justice?

***I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits.***

*~ Martin Luther King, Jr.,  
upon acceptance Nobel Peace Prize*



## Eating Healthy Food is a Civil and Human Right!

**F**ood Justice is an idea, a set of principles and something we should all strive to practice. More importantly, Food Justice is a movement and, like most social justice movements, it was born out of the lived experience of people experiencing oppression.

In many ways, Food Justice grew out of the Environmental Justice movement, where communities of color and poor working class people began to realize that their lack of access to healthy and affordable food was not the result of their own behavior, but of a food system that was motivated by profit.

It is fashionable for people to talk about how people who are living in poverty also live in a “food desert.” What they generally mean is that people don’t live close to a grocery store. Using the term “food desert” is problematic in many ways. First, a desert is a vibrant eco-system and not a barren wasteland,

as is often associated with the term. Secondly, identifying neighborhoods as food deserts ignores history and fails to acknowledge that most of these neighborhoods had small grocery stores, farmers markets, fruit and vegetable stands and lots of backyard gardens. However, economic and political decisions driven by the current industrial food system resulted in neighborhoods being both abandoned and undermined, often resulting in food insecurity.

Therefore, it would be more accurate to say that neighborhoods experiencing a lack of access to healthy, affordable food are communities experiencing Food Apartheid. Food Apartheid explains that a small number of people (agribusiness) determines the kind of food system that the masses can access. Like the apartheid imposed on Black South Africans, Food Apartheid means that few of us have a say in the current food system.



The movement for Food Justice is changing Food Apartheid. Armed with the notion that everyone has the right to eat healthy, food justice advocates engage in more locally grown food projects, sharing skills on how to grow, prepare and preserve food, while exposing the current food system's unjust nature .

The Food Justice Movement is an international movement that is ultimately fighting for Food Sovereignty, where everyone has say in the kind of food system(s) they want. Food Sovereignty is

Food Democracy, where healthy food is a right for everyone—not just for those who can afford it. Here is a list of Food Justice principles that Our Kitchen Table supports and promotes:

- Food Justice recognizes that the causes of food disparity are the result of multiple systems of oppression. To practice food justice we must do the work through an intersectional lens.
- Food Justice advocates must focus on working with the most marginalized and vulnerable populations: communities of color, communities in poverty, immigrants, children, our elders, women, people who identify as LGBTQ, those with disabilities and people experiencing homelessness.
- Food Justice require us to work towards the elimination of exploitation in our food system, both exploitation of humans and animals.
- Food Justice demands that we grow food in such a way that preserves ecological biodiversity and promotes sustainability in all aspects.
- Food Justice calls us to provide resources and skill-sharing so that people can be collectively more food self-sufficient.

*Food Justice: The benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly.*

### More Definitions

**Food Insecurity:** 1. You cannot get healthy foods. 2. You cannot store or prepare healthy foods. 3. Only junk and fast foods are available in your neighborhood.

**Food Sovereignty:** People determine the kind of food system they want, as long as it is ecologically sustainable.

**Food Desert:** Neighborhoods with little or no access to large grocery stores that offer fresh and affordable foods.

**Food Apartheid:** The intentional, systemic marketing and distribution of profitable, nutrient-poor, disease-causing foods to income-challenged neighborhoods, mainly, communities of color (i.e. communities receiving the most food assistance dollars).

## 2. Women of Color and The Fight for Food Justice

*"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 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 wellbeing of women in the decisions it makes,

especially not the well being of women of color.

Research shows that the current food system impacts women of color disproportionately with higher rates of heart disease, diabetes and obesity. 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. The vicious cycle of poverty and limited access to healthy food is further compounded because communities of color have little or no health insurance.



Check out the video!

LaDonna Redmond, TedX Talk,

Food + Justice = Democracy



Our Kitchen Table believes that these injustices need to be changed and the charge needs to be led by women of color. 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 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:**

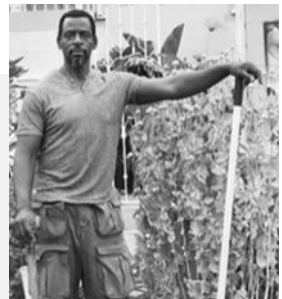
- **Having real access to healthy and nutritious food** through growing, preserving and preparing their own food. We do this by offering food growing resources and operating neighborhood-based farmers markets.
- **Changing school food policies** to guarantee that their children eat healthy, nutritious 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.

Check out the video!

Ron Finley

Guerilla Gardener

<http://www.ted.com/talks/>



### 3. Food Justice and Public Health

Most Americans would put healthcare near the top of their list of concerns. Healthcare is not only an issue of cost, but deeply impacts our daily lives. Through the lens of Food Justice, Our Kitchen Table believes that Americans are facing a public health crisis; a major contributor to this crisis is the current food system.

The consequences of poor health are directly linked to the kind of food we eat and have access to. Whether heart disease, diabetes, obesity or any number of current health issues, all connect to what foods we eat and have access to.

Though we all have some responsibility for improving our health, the current agribusiness-driven food system is the main culprit in creating poor public health. From a Food Justice perspective, here is how we understand the issues of food and public health.

- Agri-business manufactures processed food items that make up the majority of what people buy in grocery stores. Most of these food products are unhealthy to consume over an extended period of time.
- These processed food items are saturated with sugar, salt, fat and chemical preservatives, which contribute to poor public health.
- Agri-business spends millions of dollars every year lobbying Congress to limit any regulation of the food system. This makes it difficult for us to know what foods make us unhealthy.<sup>1</sup>

“People are fed by the Food Industry, which pays no attention to health,



and are treated by the Health Industry, which pays no attention to food.”

Wendell Berry

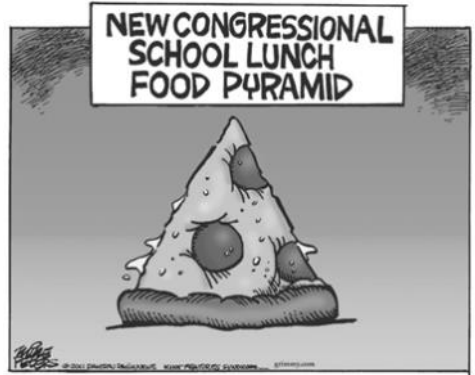
- Agri-business spends billions every year researching new ways to make food items that are **highly addictive**. This is why we all really like the stuff that is not healthy.<sup>ii</sup>
- Agri-business spends billions more marketing the unhealthiest foods to the public: soda, candy, snack foods, fast food and many other highly processed food items. Much of this marketing targets children between the ages of two and 18.<sup>iii</sup>
- The current Agri-business driven food system most negatively impacts the people most marginalized in our country—people experiencing poverty, communities of color, children and immigrant communities.
- Agri-business costs us billions of dollars in public health care costs every year. Those who have the least healthcare insurance and or no insurance are the ones most negatively impacted by these health care costs.

**The bottom line? The current food system profits by making us all sick.**



### What can we do about this?

1. Stop solely blaming individuals for unhealthy eating habits and instead realize that the current food system is the root of poor health.
2. Educate ourselves and organize campaigns that frame public health through a Food Justice lens.
3. Find allies working on public health issues and build our own power base in order to confront the current food system and create community-based options for eating healthier.
4. See that poor public health is connected to racism, sexism, economic exploitation and other forms of oppression.
5. Support local farms, organizations and retailers that provide nutritious, healthy food that the most marginalized can access.
6. Expand urban growing opportunities for communities experiencing poor health
7. Create greater access to neighborhood-based farmers markets and provide more food sharing and community kitchen opportunities— the people most negatively impacted by the unhealthy food system have fewer resources (and time) to prepare and preserve food that is not processed.
8. Pressure public health officials to acknowledge that many of the major health issues we face are caused by the food system and ensure that those same health institutions develop new strategies that challenge the current food system.
9. Grow some of our own food as an opportunity to eat better and develop greater awareness of how food impacts our health.
  - I. [www.opensecrets.org/industries/indus.php?ind=A](http://www.opensecrets.org/industries/indus.php?ind=A)
  - II. *Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us*, by Michael Moss
  - III. [http://case-studies.digitalads.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/digitalads\\_brief\\_report.pdf](http://case-studies.digitalads.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/digitalads_brief_report.pdf)



Check out the video!

Child labor in  
Michigan fields  
<https://>

[www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=DQAjyXaaYoU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQAjyXaaYoU)



## 4. Food Justice, Food Workers & a Living Wage

In May 2014, the Michigan Legislature passed a bill increasing Michigan's minimum wage to \$9.25 an hour by 2018.

Most likely, this decision was made to undercut the Democratic Party's statewide ballot initiative to raise the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour. While, raising the minimum wage is a step in the right direction, it ignores the larger issue of a living wage, especially as it relates to workers in the food industry.

A Living Wage is different than a minimum wage. It takes inflation into account inflation and addresses what an individual actually needs to earn in order to live in the current economy. Many organizers around the country are calling \$15 an hour a Living Wage and have won campaigns to get such an hourly wage passed.



These \$15 an hour campaigns are mostly being organized by workers in the food industry, restaurant workers, those in retail and the fast food industry. These food industry workers have been among the most exploited in the US in recent



decades. They are challenging a system that has made billions in profits by paying low wages.

Almost all workers in the food industry earn an unjust wage—from migrant workers and those working in food processing plants to grocery store clerks and people in restaurants, institutional food cafeterias and fast food chains. In both the restaurant and agriculture industries, minimum wage laws do not apply. Migrant workers are at the mercy of whatever farm owners want to pay them; people working for tips in restaurants have a whole different minimum wage standard applied to them.

For instance, the minimum wage for tip workers in Michigan is \$2.65 an hour. The 2014 minimum wage law would increase that to a meager \$3.52 by 2018. Imagine working for those wages and relying on the generosity of the general public—especially when larger numbers of people in the US are experiencing poverty.



As an organization that promotes and practices food justice, Our Kitchen Table (OKT) supports the efforts of food workers who are organizing to demand a livable wage and better working conditions. Check these out:

- Restaurant Organizing Committee, [rocunited.org](http://rocunited.org)
- Fast Food Forward [fastfoodforward.org](http://fastfoodforward.org)
- The migrant worker group, Coalition of Immokalee Workers, [ciw-online.org](http://ciw-online.org)

OKT knows that more and more people want to eat local, nutritious food that is chemical- and GMO-free. However, it is equally important that we demand that growers, migrant workers, restaurant workers and fast food workers be paid a living wage, have safe working conditions and have the right to organize fellow workers.

When we enter a grocery store, shop at a farmers market, eat at a restaurant or look at food labels, we should ask:

- **How were the workers who provided us with this food treated?**
- **What is the wage that these food workers make?**
- **Is it a living wage?**
- **Do these food workers have the right to organize?**
- **Does this food we are about to purchase and promote food justice?**

OKT recognizes that workers in the food industry need justice as well!

## Immigrant Deportations and Food Justice

In 2015, nearly 4 million US citizen children received SNAP benefits while living with noncitizen adults. Because immigrant adult heads of households fear deportation, many are refusing the benefits—and their children are going hungry and undernourished. In addition, local economies suffer as the number of dollars spent plummets due to current immigration policies.



Source: Immigrants Are Going Hungry Because They're Worried About Being Deported: How Trump's deportation campaign has people retreating from public life by Laura Smith, Mother Jones March 30, 2017 <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2017/03/immigrants-food-stamps-deportation-public-charges/>

## 5. The Farm Bill



The current food system in the United States is bad for the environment, bad for public health and primarily benefits the largest agricultural companies. This may not be news to most people, but what is less known is who pays for the current US food system.

Every few years, the US government adopts a new Farm Bill. The most recent Farm Bill, like the previous ones, provides billions of dollars to Big Ag and little to small, family run farms.

The 2014 Farm Bill provides \$956 Billion in taxpayer subsidies to huge corporations like Monsanto, Tyson Foods, Archer Daniels Midland, Kraft and Wal-Mart, corporations which make billions in profits annually.

So why does the US government give these corporations so much of the taxpayers' money? These companies spend millions of dollars lobbying Congress every year and they finance political candidates running for election. For example, in the 2012 election cycle, Monsanto contributed \$1,209,714 to candidates. In 2013 alone, they spent nearly \$7 million lobbying the US

Congress. (Source: [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org)) In Michigan, 2012 farm subsidies provided by taxpayers totaled \$263 million, with most of that money going to large farms growing mono-crops or livestock: corn subsidies, \$59 million; soybeans, \$35 million; and the dairy sector, more than \$22 million. (Source: <http://farm.ewg.org/>)

While providing huge subsidies to agribusiness, the 2014 Farm Bill cut \$8.6 billion in Food Assistance. During a time when more and more Americans live in poverty and rely on government food assistance programs, Congress decided to drastically cut these funds and give more taxpayer money to large corporations.

What we need is a food system that is based on food justice, where food is a right and the government does not punish marginalized communities but provides them access to healthy, nutritious food. We need to promote and practice food sovereignty, giving everyone a voice in deciding what kind of food system they want for their community. This is what Our Kitchen Table promotes and practice through their food growing and food justice work.



# 7. Food Justice and Farmers' Markets



Our Kitchen Table manages Grand Rapids' Southeast Area Farmers' Market on a food justice basis in a neighborhood with limited access to fresh, wholesome foods.

According to the US Department of Agriculture, the number of farmers' markets in the US increased from 1,700 in 1994 to more than 8,200 in 2014. This increase demonstrates the growing public interest in eating more fresh produce and supporting local growers.

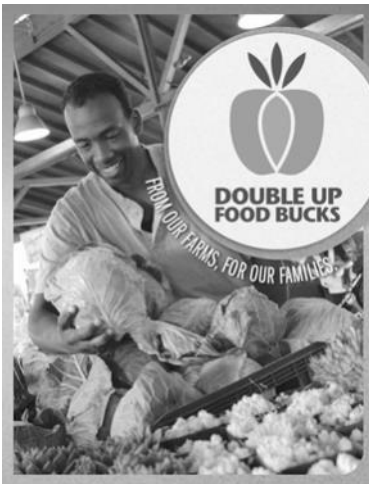
Farmers' markets also provide people an opportunity to have regular interaction with local farmers, develop relationships and have a greater appreciation for what it takes to grow food, especially outside of current agribusiness models.

However, having more farmers' markets doesn't necessarily result in a more just food system. In some ways, they can perpetuate the current food system's inequalities. For example, a farmers' market that is part of a larger urban development plan often benefits those with economic and racial privilege. These markets charge more for produce and other food items use public dollars without public input and often contribute to urban gentrification.

When looking at farmers' markets through a food justice lens, the market

should not contribute to further inequity or sustain the current food system, which creates and perpetuates food insecurity. A farmers' market that practices food justice would deliberately make it a priority to serve the nutritional needs of those most negatively impacted by the current food system. It would target communities of color, working class communities and communities experiencing poverty.

These communities consist of people receiving government food assistance like SNAP, WIC and the Double Up Food Bucks programs. The food justice movement and public health sectors have been pushing for more food assistance for purchasing fresh produce and even vegetable plants for those who want to grow their own food.



While such programs are subsidized by public money, the dollars spent on government food assistance programs pales in comparison to the public dollars supporting large corporate agribusiness. While neither subsidy is sustainable, Our Kitchen Table supports subsidizing communities experiencing poverty until our food system is truly democratic.



In addition to supporting people experiencing food insecurity, farmers' markets that practice food justice should also make it a priority to have local growers and vendors who practice ecologically sound growing practices and fair labor practices. A farmers' market practicing food justice should be transparent about these dynamics and exhibit signage that makes the practice of food justice highly visible.

Last, farmers' markets should not end up being niche markets. Rather, they should be venues for both transforming the current food system and creating new food system models.

In addition to providing more fresh food purchasing options, a farmers' market that practices food justice will educate the community about the food system and share resources and skills that empower people to collectively become more food independent, for example, cooking resources, food preservation workshops, seed exchanges, information of food policy challenges and even the development of food cooperatives.

In other words, a farmers' market that practices food justice should not only be a means to resist the current agribusiness food model, but also provide a venue for people to create truly democratic food systems that ultimately lead to food sovereignty.

# 8. Food Justice & GMOS

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) are deeply entrenched in our current food system. Most of us don't even know when we are eating something that contains GMOs. So what is the big deal? And what do GMOs have to do with food justice? The corporations behind the development and proliferation of GMOs would certainly like us to quit asking questions. Since Our Kitchen Table is a food justice organization, it's our mission to ask such questions.

GMOs are plants or animals created through the gene splicing techniques of biotechnology. This experimental technology merges DNA from different species, creating unstable combinations of plant, animal, bacterial and viral genes that cannot occur in nature or in traditional crossbreeding.

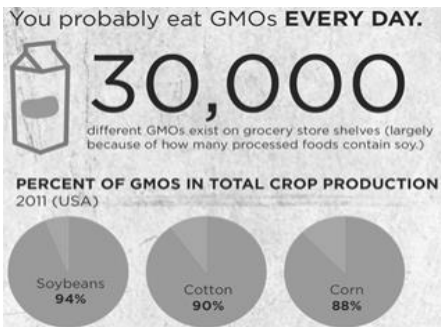
GMOs are part of the current food system in a big way, as reflected by the above info-graphic. And, they are something that the public has had little or no say in. Genetically modified organisms cause numerous problems.



1 Since most GMOs are not fully tested, we don't fully understand their impact on human health over a long period of time. According to sources like the Organic Consumers Association, GMOs have been linked to:

- Thousands of toxic and allergic reactions.
- Thousands of sick, sterile and dead livestock.
- Damage to virtually every organ and system studied in lab animals.
- Increased likelihood of allergies.
- Damage of the immune system.
- Damage of the liver.

2 The growth of GMO plants causes genetic pollution when GMO plants infect the DNA strain of non-GMO plants. This contamination may pose public health threats by creating "super weeds" that require greater amounts of more toxic pesticides to manage; threaten extinction of rare plants and their weedy relatives that we need for crop and plant bio-diversity. These weeds are not only the traditional relatives of our domesticated plants; they also assist us in overcoming crop blight.





3 GMO plants and seeds create huge problems for small farmers if, through naturally occurring cross-pollination, GMOs being used at neighboring farms contaminate their plants. Farmers save seeds from their crops to save money and rely on proven seed stock. When their seeds show evidence of containing the GMO's DNA, the current US legal system allows companies like Monsanto to sue the farmers unless they pay royalties.

Seems unjust doesn't it? Well, it is unjust. However, since agribusiness entities have lots of influence with the political system, the courts often rule in their favor, leaving both small farmers and the public on the losing side.

The good news is that an international movement to ban GMOs is gaining ground. Several dozen countries have already banned the use of GMOs; more countries are moving in that direction.

Our Kitchen Table supports banning GMOs in favor of biodiversity. The more biological diverse our diet is, the better off we will be. We also support transparency on the GMO issue. Most of us are eating GMO foods right now and don't even know it. In the US, food labels do not have list GMOs. Many states are attempting to pass legislation to require that GMOs are labeled, but the agribusiness sector is spending billions to defeat such efforts.

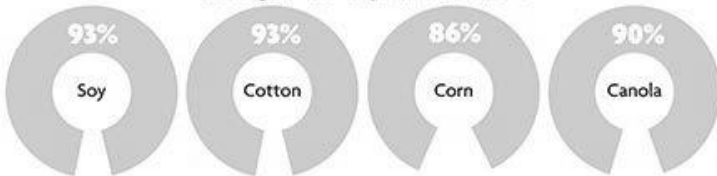
**Our Kitchen Table practices food justice that rejects the use and proliferation of GMOs by:**

- Providing heirloom seeds and plants to families involved in our home gardening program.
- Ensuring that our Southeast Area Farmer's Market vendors sell only non-GMO produce.
- Working on public policy issues that promote greater transparency and justice in our food system.

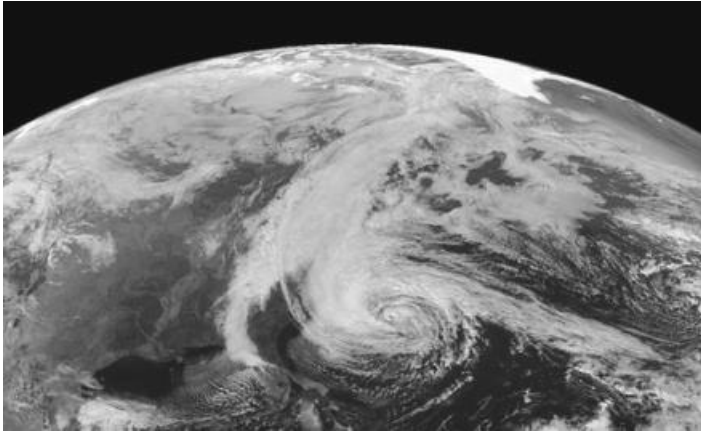


**Genetically Modified Crops Grown in the US**

Percentage of each crop that is GMO, 2010



## 9. Food Justice & Climate Change



*“Wild weather and unpredictable seasons are changing what farmers can grow and is making people hungry. Food prices are going up. Food quality is going down. Soon, climate change will affect what all of us can eat.” OXFAM*

This opening statement from the international organization OXFAM introduces its investigation into the connection between Food Justice and Climate Justice. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which is made up of thousands of the world’s leading climate scientists, our current food system is one of the main contributors to climate change.

Driven by increasing profits, the current food system contributes to climate change in the following ways:

- 1) Agribusiness practices mono-cropping, where large portions of land are devoted to growing one kind of crop. This kind of land usage not only increases the need for additional water, it degrades the quality of the soil and causes soil erosion.
- 2) Agribusiness completely depends on fossil fuels to grow and harvest food, thus contributing significantly to warming the planet. In addition, most food grown does not stay local. The average food item travels 1,000 miles before it is consumed, increasing the current food system’s dependence on fossil fuels even more.
- 3) The current food system promotes high levels of meat consumption, particularly in the US. Producing so much meat diverts large amounts of water, increases levels of methane gas and requires more land use to raise feed, resulting in deforestation and the release of more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. All of these factors further contribute to climate change.

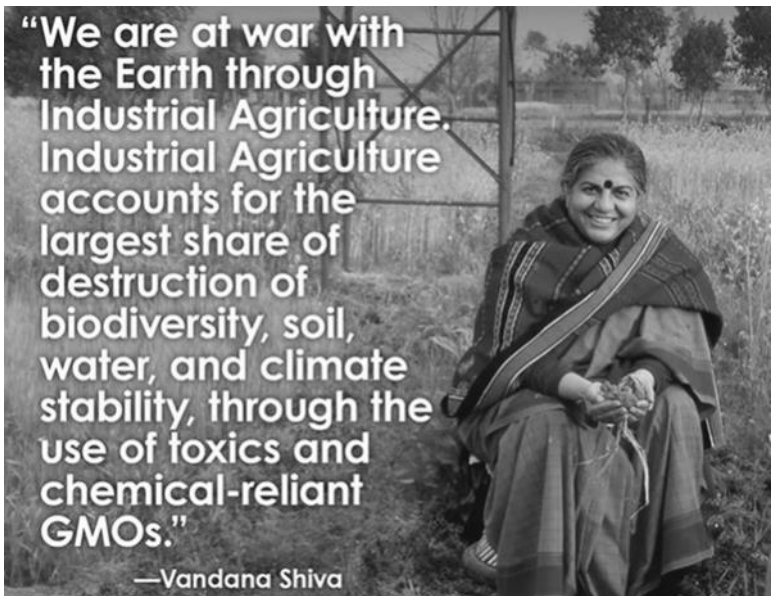
- 4) The current food system produces highly processed foods that cause the many health problems we currently face. The energy and resources used to manufacture and distribute the high volume of unhealthy processed foods are also contributing to climate change.

While the world's wealthier regions (specifically North America and Europe) are responsible for much of the current climate change crisis, its negative impacts disproportionately impact regions of the world with higher levels of poverty. This is also true within the United States, where the communities most negatively impacted by climate change are the same communities most neglected by the current food system.

This is why Our Kitchen Table recognizes the relationship between food justice and climate justice. We recognize that in order to have food justice, we need climate justice as well.

#### **Ways you can practice climate justice alongside food justice:**

- Eat food grown locally.
- Grow more of your own food.
- Reduce or eliminate meat in your diet.
- Reduce or eliminate processed foods in your diet.
- Work to build an alternative to the current food system.
- Work for a more democratic food system that leads to food sovereignty.
- Join local, national and international efforts to promote food justice and climate justice.



Vandana Shiva <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2YMLLzbXol>

# 10. Water Justice

As the media hype around the Flint Water Crisis wound down, the focus shifted to the safety of public drinking water throughout Michigan and lauding charities for collecting and distributing bottled water to Flint residents.

A lot of effort is being put into Band-Aid approaches that do not solve the root cause of the problem. Meanwhile, Flint’s children continue to be poisoned every time they drink, bathe or brush their teeth with tap water.

Although a better alternative than drinking poisoned tap water, flooding the City of Flint with bottled water causes other problems. For one, the city is now awash with millions of empty plastic bottles.

For another, bottled water is a product. Charities and individuals are purchasing this product from corporations like Nestle, which takes water from Michigan’s ground water stores.



According to a Feb. 2016 *Democracy Now* broadcast, “Nestlé, the largest water bottling company in the world, (is allowed) to pump up to 400 gallons of water per minute from aquifers that feed Lake Michigan ... in Mecosta County, Nestlé is



not required to pay anything to extract the water, besides a small permitting fee to the state and the cost of leases to a private landowner. In fact, the company received \$13 million in tax breaks from the state to locate the plant in Michigan.”

While our state and city governments cannot find money to repair our failing water infrastructures, they can afford to give away millions, if not billions, of dollars to private corporations that have convinced us to buy bottled water.

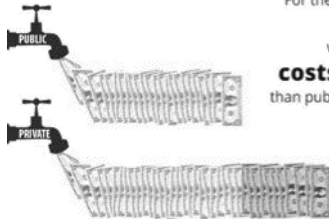
Many communities across the country and around the world have sold their municipal water works to private corporations – with disastrous results. In 2011, the City of Grand Rapids considered privatizing its water. Thankfully, Mayor Heartwell declined.

According to Food and Water Watch, water privatization “undermines the human right to water ... When private corporations buy or operate public water utilities – is often suggested as a solution to municipal budget problems and aging water systems.

Unfortunately, this more often backfires, leaving communities with higher rates, worse service, job losses, and more.”

Food & Water Watch has documented these, among other, problems with privatizing water:

- Loss of Control. Local government officials abdicate control over a vital public resource.
- Loss of transparency. Private operators usually restrict public access to information.
- The objectives of a profit-extracting water company can conflict with the public interest.
- Cherry picking service areas. Private water companies are prone to cherry-picking service areas to avoid serving low-income communities.
- Rate Increases. Investor owned utilities typically charge 63 percent more for sewer service than local government utilities.



For the typical household, privately owned water utility service **costs 59% more** than public water service — **about \$185 each year.**

- Higher Operating Costs. Private operation is not more efficient and can increase the cost of financing a water project by 50 to 150 %.
- Service Problems. This is the primary reason that local governments reverse the decision to privatize.
- Jobs. Privatization typically leads to a loss of one in three water jobs.
- Privatization can allow systems to deteriorate.
- Loss of public input. Citizens don't vote in the corporate boardroom.



In its handouts, OKT often includes the words, “Healthy food is your family’s right.” We also proclaim, “Clean, harmless water is your family’s right.” Therefore, OKT asks you to join with us in demanding that the City of Grand Rapids, City of Wyoming and Michigan municipalities:

1. Ensure that our tap water is safe to drink and bathe in. This includes employing more reliable testing measures for lead content.
2. Reconsider fluoridating our water supply as fluoride has been associated with health risks. Let people choose for themselves whether or not to ingest fluoride.
3. Decline from considering privatizing our municipal water supplies.
4. Call for the end of giving Michigan’s water away to Nestle and other bottled water corporations.

# 11. Food Justice & Animal Rights

*“A measure of a society can be how well its people treat its animals.”*

Mahatmas Ghandi

A mong the many unethical practices that comprise the current industrial food system, the brutalization of livestock animals is an ever present atrocity. During our trips to the supermarket, we rarely consider the price animals pay so that the food industry can profit. This is not a judgment on the grocery-buying public. The industry has manipulated our spending habits with messaging that convinces us that not only are the cows happy, but eating fast-foods, junk foods and convenience foods will bring us happiness, as well.

## **The CAFO: Concentrated Animal Feed Operation.**

In 2011, factory farms raised 99.9% of our chickens for meat, 97% of laying hens, 99% of turkeys, 95% of pigs and 78% of cattle sold in the US. Industrial agriculture is one of the biggest contributors to global climate change; CAFOs are a major factor. According to Sierra Club of Michigan, *“CAFOs produce huge amounts of animal sewage and other pollutants. CAFO owners and operators spend millions of dollars on technologies that make it possible to produce massive quantities of milk, eggs, and meat, yet they resist investing in technologies and practices to properly treat the wastes that are by-products of this industry ... The sheer amount of wastes produced ... often overwhelms the ability of the land and crops to absorb CAFO wastes.”*



**Animals raised inhumanely provide meat, milk and eggs that are less nutritious and even harmful.**

When cattle graze freely on grass rather than eating grains in CAFOs, the meat has less fat and more heart-healthy nutrients that can reduce heart disease and cancer. Eggs from free-range chickens offer similar benefits. (Beware the term “cage-free.” This is not free-range.)

When it comes to milk and cheese, cows who ingest hormones and antibiotics pass these along to the consumer. The growth hormones found in milk are one factor in girls reaching puberty at a younger age. (Others include pesticides in produce, obesity and phthalates in plastics and cosmetics.) CAFO’s overuse of antibiotics



contributes to the rise of deadly, drug resistant bacteria.

### **Livestock animals on CAFOs suffer terribly.**

Crammed together by the thousands, shoulder to shoulder, in pens that don't allow them to move, they endure excruciating pain, debilitating illness and absolutely no opportunity to enjoy what was once every animal's birthright: sunshine, fresh air and socializing with others of its kind. Mother animals are not even allowed to instinctively care for their suckling young.

Hormones that increase milk production cause dairy cows to live every day in pain as they are over-engorged with milk. Growth hormones cause chickens to put meat on so rapidly that their bones break because they cannot support their own weight. Until the FDA intervened in 2015, US poultry factories routinely fed their birds arsenic-based drugs to promote weight gain. Because much of our chicken comes from China (and origin labeling is not required), it's difficult to know if it contains arsenic.

### **How can you stand for livestock animal rights?**

OKT offers these options for reducing the pain, misery, pollution and disease caused by the industrial food system's inhumane treatment of animals.

- **Consider a vegetarian diet.** Another option, the pescatarian diet includes fish (avoid CAFO fish farmed fish). Pregnant women need 80 to 100 grams of protein a day so a vegan diet may not be advisable. OKT does not endorse "lab meats" being developed as we believe these Franken-foods may be



shown to be harmful. Check out chef Bryant Terry's cookbook, *Afro-Vegan*.

- **Buy meat, milk, cheese and eggs that have been humanely produced.** Local sources of free-range meat, milk and eggs are your best bet. These products will cost more so eat a little less. Add more fruits and vegetables to your plate – and be healthier for it.
- **Reduce meat consumption.** The food industry has brain-washed us into thinking meat makes the meal. Our bodies do not need large amounts of meat – or meat every day. Eat legumes for protein, e.g. refried beans, hummus, black eyed peas, peanut butter. If possible, ask your mothers and grandmothers how they ate before the '60s and '70s. They most likely have a long list of meatless meals.
- **Use cosmetics labeled "Cruelty Free/ Not Tested on Animals."**
- **Join the Food Justice Movement.** Learn about the issues. Get involved with local groups making a difference. Let your commissioners, representatives and senators know how you feel about CAFOs, product testing on animals and other food justice issues. Help OKT build a just and sustainable alternative to the current food system.

## 12. Food Justice & Brain Equity



**W**hen considering intellect, intelligence, IQ or mental health, we seldom make a connection with food. However, a very distinct and strong connection exists – from the womb to the meals we prepare for our elders. Because people of color are more likely to lack access to the foods that build healthy brains and maintain well-functioning psyches, intelligence levels and mental health are another facet of food justice. OKT calls this lack of access “food apartheid.”

Since environmental toxins play a part in diminishing intellect and contributing to mental illness, these are facets of the larger environmental justice conversation.



### In the Womb

Studies have shown that pregnant moms need to eat 80 to 100 grams of protein as part of a well-balanced diet to ensure healthy infant outcomes. That well-balanced diet includes foods rich in calcium, healthy fats, fresh fruits and vegetables and 100% whole grains. The Standard American Diet will not satisfy this requirement. The junk food, fast foods and convenience foods prevalent in most income-challenged neighborhoods are even worse. Healthy brain growth especially depends on protein.

Infant mortality rates are double for black babies, compared to white. While the stress of racism plays a huge part in these numbers, under-nutrition during pregnancy is a factor, especially when babies born at term are underweight.

### At the Breast ... or Bottle

Breastfeeding is the very best food for infants. Among its many benefits, breast milk boosts baby’s intelligence. When the CDC investigated why fewer black women breastfed than white women, they found that the hospitals serving black women during childbirth were less likely to encourage and support breastfeeding. In addition, women in poverty, working one or more low-wage jobs, may not be able to pump milk when they are away from their babies.

Because breastfeeding moms need to continue the same healthy diet they ate during pregnancy, lack of access to healthy foods continues to be a barrier to infants reaching their full intelligence potential after birth.

The human brain grows the most during pregnancy and the first three years of life. Diets high in fat, sugar, and processed foods during the first three years of life permanently lower children’s IQ. Wilder Research reports, “... nutrition affects students’ thinking skills, behavior, and health, all factors that impact academic performance.

Research suggests that diets high in trans



and saturated fats can negatively impact learning and memory, nutritional deficiencies early in life can affect the cognitive development of school-aged children, and access to nutrition improves students' cognition, concentration, and energy levels."

Babies can thrive exclusively on breastmilk for the first year of life. Introducing solid foods earlier than six months of age can lead to obesity, allergies, asthma and digestive difficulties. Breastfeeding until age three or longer is common in many cultures and can help support healthy brain growth.

Whatever age babies wean from the breast, it's important that parents introduce a healthy, whole foods diet. The commercial-baby-food diet (we are brainwashed to believe in) does not meet these needs.

### In the Classroom

Research has also established a link between nutrition and behavior. "Access to nutrition, particularly breakfast, can enhance a student's psychosocial well-being, reduce aggression and school suspensions, and decrease discipline problems "

Harvard studies agree. "Diets high in refined sugars ... are harmful to the brain. In addition to worsening your body's regulation of insulin, they also promote inflammation and oxidative stress. Multiple studies have found a correlation between a diet high in refined sugars and impaired brain function — and even a worsening of symptoms of mood disorders, such as depression."



ROSEMARY



SPINACH



TOMATOES



RED CABBAGE

### As an Adult

"Food is like a pharmaceutical compound that affects the brain," says UCLA food-brain expert, Fernando Gómez-Pinilla. He reports that junk food and fast food negatively affect the brain's synapses. This can result in loss of cognitive function (memory loss, brain fog, dementia) and mental illness (depression, schizophrenia, ADD and bi-polar) Gomez-Pinilla goes as far to say, "Evidence indicates that what you eat can affect your grandchildren's brain molecules and synapses."

In other words, when an unjust food system prevents a generation from having access to healthy, whole foods, its children and grandchildren have increased risks for lowered cognitive function and mental illness.



CHIA



NUTS



QUINOA



WHOLE GRAINS



SUNFLOWER SEEDS

### Our Elders, Forgetting and Forgotten

Food apartheid inexcusably impacts our elders. When it's too difficult to prepare meals, junk and convenience foods are too easy an answer. Fixed incomes can result in choosing the least nutritious options available. The food charity that elders access mostly consists of highly processed foods and white grain products. Some are making strides in offering elders healthier meals, for example Meals on Wheels, but what is needed is a food system that makes whole foods accessible to everyone, no matter their income, age or neighborhood.

**Only Food Justice can ensure "brain equity."** When all people have access to healthy whole foods, from cradle to grave, only then can they reach their potentials for intellect and mental health.

# OKT Taking Action

## Food Gardening Programs



### Residential Growing Program

From 2010 to 2016, OKT offered gardening resources to neighbors living within its four target neighborhoods (SECA, Baxter, Eastown or Garfield Park). All services are offered to qualified participants at no charge. To qualify participants, OKT looked at if they were pregnant or had children eighth-grade or younger, had challenges that limit access to healthy food; or had health challenges that can be addressed by growing food.

OKT offered educational workshops, free soil testing, gardening tools, starter food plants, garden coaches and compost.

### Other Food Gardens

OKT grows all of its own organic food starter plants at Blandford Farm, starting in February of the year. In 2017, OKT expanded its gardening program at two Grand Rapids Public Schools where students grew food for healthy in-school snacks and to bring home to their households. Student households interested in growing their own food were

supported with plants, soil, containers and a garden coach and growing classes. We have also provided free plants and gardening support to Wyoming Public School gardens, Canaanland Preschool garden, the Kent County Juvenile Detention Facility garden, the Kent County Health Department WIC garden and various community gardens.

### Garden Education

OKT hosts free classes on “How to Grow a Food Garden,” “Composting and Vermiculture” and “How to Save Seeds.” Though these classes are mainly for the benefit of participants in our growing programs, all classes are free and open to the public.

**How you can help:** Come to our classes, learn and share your expertise and bring your friends and neighbors.

## SOUTHEAST AREA

**Fresh Produce from  
Local Farmers &  
Gardens  
Opens June 20!**



## FARMERS MARKET

**Double Up Food Bucks  
WIC ProjectFresh •SNAP  
Cash Value Benefits  
Summer EBT• Debit  
Sr. Project Fresh**

MLK Park, corner of Franklin St. and Fuller Ave. SE. The market is open June through November, Saturdays 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**How you can help:** Stop by the market each week to purchase fresh local produce, cottage kitchen goods and other items. Tell your friends and family about the Double Up Food Bucks program that lets Bridge Card patrons buy twice as much fresh Michigan produce for their money.



# Food Justice Policy Work

OKT offers Food Justice classes throughout the years as part of our growing and education programs and at conferences and presentations to various groups addressing food access in Michigan. We also work on policy issues by raising awareness through our website and Facebook, creating educational materials (e.g. our Food Justice Series and Just Food Dollars Campaign) and collaborating with other organizations. Issues we have addressed include:

- Grand Rapids: composting
- ordinance, urban hens, vacant lots for growing food, planting urban fruit orchards and joining a campaign requesting that the City break ties with Veolia Corporation,

a company that profits from Palestinian Apartheid in Gaza.

- Michigan: Sen Stabenow’s leadership of 2014 Farm Bill, Paid Sick Leave Campaign, yard waste composting bill.
- National: Senate Bill S 510 Food Safety Modernization Act (made saving seeds illegal)

**How you can help:** Follow our web blog and take action. Talk to your city, county, state and federal representatives. Vote in local as well as state and national elections. Find your elected officials at [commoncause.org](http://commoncause.org) — click on “Find Your Lawmakers” at very top of page.

# Educational Materials about Food Justice

OKT has developed a series of handouts on different Food Justice topics. Most of them have been included in this handout. The individual handouts are available at no charge on the OKT website in formats for both printing on paper and sharing electronically. Topics include:

- The Farm Bill
- What Is Food Justice?
- Women of Color & Food Justice
- Food Workers & a Living Wage
- Food Justice & Climate Change

- Food Justice & GMOs
- Food Justice & Farmers’ Markets
- Food Justice & Public Health
- Oral Health
- How to Save Seeds
- Politics of Food

**How you can help:** Download, print and share our free resources whenever you have a need or opportunity to speak up about food justice.





## An OKT Campaign

**J**ust *change* how you feel about food assistance. With government food assistance comes social stigma. Many of us see food assistance as a handout—and a disgrace. Our Kitchen Table asks you to challenge that notion.

The 2014 Farm Bill increased agribusiness welfare to \$956 billion and cut \$8.6 billion from food assistance programs. *Imagine for a moment how \$956 billion of public money redirected to healthy food for the public could impact our neighborhoods.*

### **Just *imagine* a just food system.**

OKT's Just Food Dollars Campaign also seeks to promote a more just food system by accomplishing the following:

- 1) Educate the public about how their tax dollars are used to support an unjust and unhealthy food system.
- 2) Challenge the public to view government food assistance programs as beneficial and warranting increased funding.
- 3) Illustrate that government food assistance programs give public money back to the public. It's our own money!
- 4) Invite more people experiencing poverty and food insecurity to sign up for any and all food assistance

programs, especially the Double Up Food Bucks program. (Our Kitchen Table is signing people up for this program.)

- 5) Encourage people to support the local food system by patronizing the Southeast Area Farmers Market, participating in OKT's Food Growing Program and attending workshops and food sharing opportunities so that we can build a movement that creates food justice and food sovereignty.

**OKT invites you and all community organizations to partner with us in our Just Food Dollars campaign.** First, rethink how you yourself view government assistance programs that enable your neighbors to exercise their right to healthy food.

Second, refer your friends and neighbors using Bridge Cards to us so we can sign them up for Double Up Food Bucks.

Last, and most important, join us by posting and sharing our Just Food Campaign information so we can inspire a larger community conversation about how our food system is funded and how we can make it more just.

# Via Campesina's Seven Principles of Food Sovereignty

ViaCampesina.org

1. **Food: A Basic Human Right.** Everyone must have access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in sufficient quantity and quality to sustain a healthy life with full human dignity. Each nation should declare that access to food is a constitutional right and guarantee the development of the primary sector to ensure the concrete realization of this fundamental right.

2. **Agrarian Reform.** Genuine agrarian reform gives landless and farming people — especially women — ownership and control of the land they work and returns territories to indigenous peoples. The right to land must be free of discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, race, social class or ideology; the land belongs to those who work it.

3. **Protecting Natural Resources.** Food Sovereignty entails the sustainable care and use of natural resources, especially land, water, and seeds and livestock breeds. The people who work the land must have the right to practice sustainable management of natural resources and to conserve biodiversity free of restrictive intellectual property rights. This can only be done from a sound economic basis with security of tenure, healthy soils and reduced use of agro-chemicals.

4. **Reorganizing Food Trade.** Food is first and foremost a source of nutrition and only secondarily an item of trade. National agricultural policies must prioritize production for domestic consumption and food self-sufficiency. Food imports must not displace local production nor depress prices.

5. **Ending the Globalization of Hunger.** Food Sovereignty is undermined by multilateral institutions and by speculative capital. The growing control of multinational corporations over agricultural policies has been facilitated by the economic policies of multilateral organizations such as the WTO, World Bank and the IMF. Regulation and taxation of speculative capital and a strictly enforced Code of Conduct for TNCs [Trans-National Corporations] is therefore needed.

6. **Social Peace.** Everyone has the right to be free from violence. Food must not be used as a weapon. Increasing levels of poverty and marginalization in the countryside, along with the growing oppression of ethnic minorities and indigenous populations, aggravate situations of injustice and hopelessness. The ongoing displacement, forced urbanization, repression and increasing incidence of racism of smallholder farmers cannot be tolerated.

7. **Democratic control.** Smallholder farmers must have direct input into formulating agricultural policies at all levels. The United Nations and related organizations will have to undergo a process of democratization to enable this to become a reality. Everyone has the right to honest, accurate information and open and democratic decision-making. These rights form the basis of good governance, accountability and equal participation in economic, political and social life, free from all forms of discrimination. Rural women, in particular, must be granted direct and active decision making on food and rural issues.

**WE, THE PEOPLE OF COLOR**, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to ensure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples, do affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice:

## The Principles of Environmental Justice (EJ)

- 1) **Environmental Justice** affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
- 2) **Environmental Justice** demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
- 3) **Environmental Justice** mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
- 4) **Environmental Justice** calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
- 5) **Environmental Justice** affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
- 6) **Environmental Justice** demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
- 7) **Environmental Justice** demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.
- 8) **Environmental Justice** affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
- 9) **Environmental Justice** protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
- 10) **Environmental Justice** considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration On Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.
- 11) **Environmental Justice** must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.
- 12) **Environmental Justice** affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and provided fair access for all to the full range of resources.
- 13) **Environmental Justice** calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.
- 14) **Environmental Justice** opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.
- 15) **Environmental Justice** opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.
- 16) **Environmental Justice** calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.
- 17) **Environmental Justice** requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to ensure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

**More info on environmental justice and environmental racism can be found online at [www.ejnet.org/ej/](http://www.ejnet.org/ej/)**

*Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC, drafted and adopted these 17 principles of Environmental Justice. Since then, the Principles have served as a defining document for the growing grassroots movement for environmental justice.*



*Growing justice.*

[www.OKTjustice.org](http://www.OKTjustice.org)

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*Healthy Food is a Civil and Human Right!*

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