

# Food Policy for Food Justice: Food Justice & Public Health

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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.

“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

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>i</sup>
- 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)

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