

Podcast 1

Introduction: What are Common Problems in Food and Agriculture?

In northern Maine, a few-thousand acre potato farm hauls in its harvest in truckloads, storing masses of potatoes in warehouses larger than gymnasiums. Much of this food goes to feed the surrounding states, and possibly even the whole country. This is how American and worldwide farming has developed: industrial, wholesale, and highly systematized. Proponents of industrial agriculture say that this is the best way to feed the world, which could be true. In order to curb worldwide hunger in the society we have today, this model is effective in providing food to millions of American households. This however, leads to several problems, regarding human and environmental health. Although this system of producing mass quantities of food at low costs, feeding many, there is still a problem with food insecurity. One in 8 of American households are food insecure (Wolfram, 2017). This podcast acts as an introductory discussion to food justice and farming, drawing on real life experiences of people and farms in order to inform the explanation of diverse contributing factors to injustices related to food.

Carla, a friend of mine, lives in rural Maine, and her husband is on hospice. All her bills go to supporting her husband's care while she is at work all day, and she barely has enough money to buy food for the both of them and their dog. They eat a lot of fried food, ham sandwiches from the local pizza shop, or chips and soda, because it's all there is. And it's cheap, too. Carla is on a diet and trying to lose weight by eating chips, soda, and a ration of microwave dinners from NutriSystem. Rod, her husband who is sick, is overweight, too, which exaggerates his end-stage COPD. Carla and Rod's lives are just one example of how many people with limited funds, often are forced to get cheap foods high in calories and low in nutrition.

Proponents of a local organic food movement may argue that providing more locally grown vegetable alternatives is healthier and better for the environment. This may be true, but the local food movement is highly based off of property rights and property taxes. A small farm can exist in a place where land is cheap enough to buy, but it often depends on a local collection of higher-class people willing and able to buy the more expensive, locally grown products. Even if someone like Carla were to go to the grocery store or farmer's market, a \$5 1- pound bag of local blue potatoes could not compare to a \$5 2.5-pound bag of white potatoes from Idaho or Northern Maine.

What makes the 2.5 pound bag of potatoes from Northern Maine so cheap? In the food system, the truck drivers, wholesale collectors, and retail sellers are all paid a living wage, while the farmers are often given the short end of the stick. Industrial farmers have elevated their practice to the highest efficiency, decreasing as much labor as possible, and mechanizing the work, making the act of farming thousands of acres necessary for earning any kind of living wage, and somewhat manageable with large machinery. People like Carla and Rod are inadvertently forced, simply by cost and availability, into supporting the food system that creates inequities for farmers and people.

Food systems, farming, and justice within these systems is complicated, and solutions to these problems are not easy. There are movements, or I like to think of them as vignettes to a dialog, that provide alternative methods of practicing farming or food justice in equitable ways. In this series of podcasts, I will present and discuss its the roots of some inequities related to farming, discuss alternative practices, especially those relating to farming and food in Maine. I look forward to joining you in this journey of exploring more about food and farming justice!

Works Cited

Wolfram, T., 2017. "The Hungry and Overweight Paradox." *Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*. Accessed on November 3rd, 2017, from: <http://www.eatright.org/resource/health/weight-loss/overweight-and-obesity/the-hungry-and-overweight-paradox>