

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE'S FOOD JUSTICE VALUES

September 2021



The food system intersects with all aspects of our socio-political reality including health, land stewardship, diversity of culture, housing, the environment, economic opportunity and labor. A healthy food system is vital to our community's ability to thrive and be well. Access to nutritious, culturally relevant and affordable food is directly linked to quality of life.

One of the most common ways to address food injustices is through a food security or access framework. While the food access framework helps decision makers address hunger and inequitable access to food, the use of this framework often perpetuates the root causes of food injustice or, at best, leaves them unaddressed. The Environmental Justice Committee asserts that in order to address the root causes of food injustice, a more holistic framework of food sovereignty is needed.

For all people who live, play, learn, worship, and work in Seattle to have self-determination in the food system, we must value and recognize that:

1 We must fundamentally shift how we relate to our food, the people who grow it, and the land on which it is grown.

- Seattle's food system is part of a local and global system and must address root causes of racial, social, and environmental injustices.
- The food system must be rooted in reciprocity and move away from an extractive economy towards a regenerative infrastructure.
- We must clearly link food to promoting long-term mental and physical health and well-being.
- Shift our food system to prioritize Black liberation and Indigenous sovereignty including centering Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), land back to local Tribes and reparations.
- Reimagine food and nutrition education to center cultural food traditions, joy, and reclamation of health.

2 Agricultural and food workers in the United States have long been among the most exploited laborers in the country. Just food policies must center workers in the food system and ensure they have safety, the right to organize, dignity, healthcare, and livable wages in their workplaces.

3 The City must address the historical disinvestment in BIPOC communities that have exacerbated an ongoing lack of access and affordability to land ownership for housing and growing food.

- Urban development must use innovative solutions that do not pit density and affordable housing against access to green spaces and land to grow food and traditional medicines.
- We must restore our traditional and cultural connections to food through access to thriving land.

4 Our food system is part of the climate crisis. Food policies and programs need to be led by and prioritize those harmed first and worst including low-income, BIPOC, Queer, disabled, unhoused and undocumented people.

- We must create pathways for a lighter ecological footprint to foster a circular food economy.

5 We must ensure that all people have a choice to nourishing, culturally relevant food. This includes:

- Understanding and having a choice of healthy foods that are affordable, free of toxins, and not highly processed.
- Respecting and centering the various cultures that exist around food
- Recognizing that healing through food is an important aspect for our communities.
- Having reciprocal relationships with foods and sourcing of foods



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Definitions and Additional Context

Below are guiding definitions and context for Seattle's Environmental Justice Committee's food justice values. We understand that issues in the food system are complex and ever-changing, and believe this framework is a living document with working definitions inspired by local, national, and international organizations and movements organizing for food sovereignty. We encourage readers to do their own learning and exploration of key topics and understand that this is just a starting point for many in-depth conversations, program development and evaluation within the City of Seattle.

Extractive economy

An economy based on the removal of wealth from communities through the depletion and degradation of the living world, the exploitation of human labor, and the accumulation of wealth by interests outside of the community and environment (i.e. Big Banks, Big Ag, Big Oil and Big Box stores).

Regenerative infrastructure

An economy based on reflective, responsive, reciprocal relationships of interdependence between human communities and the living world upon which we depend.

Labor Rights

The EJC's work is deeply connected to workers, unions, and worker collectives that are calling for an overhaul in the food system towards just labor policies. We encourage readers to follow local and regional organizations leading on these issues and to stay up-to-date on labor rights disputes and build in ways to ensure City programs or procurement contracts can be responsive as a result. Some organizations we look to for leadership on these issues include: [Familias Unidas por La Justicia](#), [UFCW Local 21](#) and regionally [Community to Community's](#) organizing in Washington State for a Farmworker's Bill of Rights.

¹ <https://nyeleni.org/en/synthesis-report/>

² <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/explore/food-cities-the-circular-economy>

³ [Knowing home: NisGa'a traditional knowledge and wisdom improve environmental decision making. - Free Online Library \(thefreelibrary.com\)](#)

Self-determination

The process by which a nation, community, or person can control their own destiny, including political status and to freely pursue social, economic, and cultural development. Self-determination is key part of movements for Black liberation and Indigenous sovereignty and with an environmental justice lens, must consider the right to land access, natural resources, and environmental health.

Food sovereignty

The Environmental Justice Committee is inspired by the global movement for food justice and looks to the Declaration of the Forum for Food Sovereignty in Nyéléni, Mali in 2007 for inspiration. The six pillars of food sovereignty include: focusing on food for people, valuing food providers, localizing food systems, putting control locally, building knowledge and skills to manage food production and harvesting systems, and working with nature to improve resilience and adaptation.¹

Circular Food Economy

In a circular economy, organic resources such as those from food by-products, are free from contaminants and can safely be returned to the soil in the form of organic fertilizer. Some of these by-products can provide additional value before this happens by creating new food products, fabrics for the fashion industry, or as sources of bioenergy. These cycles regenerate living systems, such as soil, which provide renewable resources, and support biodiversity.² A circular food economy prevents food waste, redistributes high-quality, surplus food to those who need it, and turns inedible food by-products and food waste into new products.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

"Traditional Ecological Knowledge is a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs, handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment...." Fikret Berket³

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