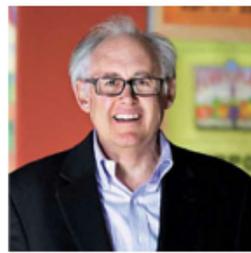


Last year, CA4Health initiated a number of processes to determine the top issue areas of interest for members of our Community of Practice. When it comes to public health, Food Justice was an overwhelming priority for action and shared learning. As we kick off 2017, we wanted to hear from some leaders in this area of work to gather their perspectives on Food Justice, social movements, and the year ahead.



Janaki Jagannath (JJ):
Coordinator, Community
Alliance for Agroecology
(Fresno, CA)



Michael Dimock (MD):
President, Roots of Change
(Oakland, CA)



Elle Mari, M.Sc. (EM): Director,
Urban Food Environments,
Center for Community Health,
University of California, San
Diego (San Diego, CA)
(Elle, second from left and her
colleagues)



Planting Justice (PJ):
<http://www.plantingjustice.org/> (Oakland,
CA)

Interview Highlights:

1. What does Food Justice mean to you and your work?

JJ: Food Justice really means access to participation in the imagining of your community. Taken a bit further, we get into switching from Food Justice to Food Sovereignty – including access to decision-making around natural resources.

PJ: To us, Food Justice means transforming the food system in a way that democratizes access to affordable, nutritious food, expands job opportunities for historically disenfranchised people, and ensures environmental sustainability. We believe that nutritious food is a human right, not a commodity, luxury or status symbol.

MD: Food Justice is a tool to overcome the social determinants of health. Food Justice is a means to end the historical systems of structural oppression that have kept people of color and low income white folk from accessing and affording healthy food and receiving living wages for their labor in the agricultural and food sector. Food Justice is achieved by helping isolated or underserved communities to build new structures that end the oppression and allow access, enable purchase and render higher wages.

EM: Food Justice to me means consciously working in a space and within a framework that acknowledges and addresses institutional and historical oppressions in our food system and builds community-owned solutions towards systemic positive change.

2. What makes working in the area of Food Justice unique in 2017?

PJ: 2017 is an exciting - albeit sometimes terrifying - time to be alive and working for justice in the United States. One of our early mottos at Planting Justice is, “Compost the Empire” - and we believe that the empire is indeed beginning to die. We want to seize this opportunity to work with everyday folks to take the food system back from corporations that exploit our health, our communities, our labor, and our planet - before it's too late.

EM: Food Justice is a framework for change that gives attention to the following: oppressions (race, class, gender), community engagement, economic justice for the disenfranchised, cultural relevancy, environmental sustainability, and the notion that we all have the right to healthy affordable food in order to thrive. These values are currently being challenged at a societal level. Working towards Food Justice is imperative now more than ever in order to demand new policies/programs and protect existing policies that support fairness in our food system.

3. From your perspective, how does Food Justice offer broad opportunities for traditional health partners to engage in equity movements that advocate for economic and social justice as well?

JJ: We must bravely, together, address these challenges that are at the core of our history – and recognize that these movements are not separate. They tie back to the history of the United States and the settling of agriculture on this continent. Food Justice and Black Lives Matter, Food Justice and rights for immigrants regardless of religion, Food Justice and the protection of trans lives, Food Justice and climate justice-- these are all linked. It is our task to remind and remember, all of us, the importance of making these linkages, and in the wellbeing of our people – one is not without the other.

EM: A Food Justice orientation to doing community/public health work offers advocates an opportunity to get at the root of things. Educating people on healthy lifestyle changes is important. Co-creating a built environment that provides easy access to a healthy lifestyle is also important. But perhaps most important, in my view, is creating opportunities for more community-level power to define problems and solutions from within.

4. What do you see as the role of community leadership in this work?

JJ: Community voices and leaders have always been the ones carrying these dialogues forward. Sometimes we can rely on political and educational institutions to work in partnership with us, but when it comes to access to food for all, this work has been led by grassroots organizations and women in particular - they play a critical role and are to be honored especially by those who do not approach such work from an experiential space.

MD: Without community leadership the initiatives to improve Food Justice will fail because they will not be authentic or legitimate, which means they will not be embraced by communities needing to be served...Community leadership is essential.

5. What do you see as the most critical points of action in the year ahead to advance/support Food Justice issues?

PJ: In the year ahead, we are focused on 3 priorities: 1. Building more gardens for more people; 2. Helping disenfranchised communities get access to land which they can use to feed and house themselves; 3. Promoting holistic re-entry programs to eliminate recidivism.

MD: Increased funding is essential as well as increased commitment to policy advocacy and intervention. We need a [501]C4 and willingness to wade into the hardball politics required to shift the priorities of legislators.