



Growing Food Justice – How Going Local Can Help Feed the World

by [Mia-Rut](#) · May 13th, 2010



How does the food movement intersect with issues of poverty? For the hundred or so participants at the Growing Food Justice event last night we got a little taste of some of the issues and what we can do about it. The event was sponsored by the AJWS-Avodah partnership and was co-sponsored by Hazon. They brought together three activists who are fighting in very different ways to prevent hunger in New York City.

Joel Berg, the Executive Director of the [New York City Coalition Against Hunger](#) and author of *All You Can Eat: How Hungry is America?* started out with some numbers: 1.4 million New Yorkers living in households who cannot afford enough food and an estimated 400,000 (1 out of 5 children) in the City are hungry. “But,” he said, “hunger is not about lack of food – it is about the ability to earn enough money to afford enough food.” What’s the solution? A serious focus on living wage jobs and a serious support of food safety net programs and support local community support systems. Food justice not just food charity.

Karen Washington, who started her discussion by describing herself as an urban farmer is also the President of the [NYC Community Gardens Coalition](#). “Let all the rich people pay for everything and food should be free,” she said. Other points she made from her impassioned speech included: When you talk about changing the food system, it needs to be inclusive. Until rooms like this are filled with the people who are hungry, there will not be real change. This has to happen from the grassroots up. We have a generation of children who have no idea where their food is coming from. We need to educate people

around the process of agriculture. And its not just about access to affordable food, but it is also about jobs. Welfare and foodstamps was supposed to be a temporary thing – not generation after generation. When talking about sustainable agriculture, the kids should be involved. Teach agriculture in schools. Solutions need to be developed from the bottom up, not from the top down. Food levels the playing field. It is a right and not a privilege. The land of milk and honey has become the land of greed and money. Food is the new civil rights.

Daniel Bowman Simon, who had founded the successful [White House Organic Farm Project](#) is now spearheading the [People's Garden NYC](#) – respectfully asking Mayor Bloomberg to allow a Community garden in front of City Hall. Daniel's presentation included multi-media like the video above. He showed photos of his trip across the country in what is now called the [topsy-turvy bus](#). And we know how the story ends, Michelle Obama planted an organic garden last year and in the process of expanding again this year. Over half of the food from the garden was donated to Miriam's Kitchen – a local DC food pantry. After the White House, Daniel was hopeful that this idea would take root in other public places as well. [Baltimore](#), Milwaukee, [San Francisco](#), and [Portland](#) have all planted vegetables outside their City Halls – so why not New York City? Daniel showed historical photographs of urban gardens in NYC from the early 1900's. His petition to Mayor Bloomberg is online here and it can also be printed out to gather additional signatures – like the [South Bronx Food Coop](#) does.

At the end of the presentations there was a brief but heated discussion about the state's Fresh Program. And interesting discussion of free and reduced school lunches and the idea of universal breakfasts. There was plenty of time for shmoozing and networking after as well as yummy food catered from a restaurant that has the [Tav HaYosher](#).

Overall it was a terrific event, hopefully the first of many food justice events for the AJWS-Avodah partnership.