

FSLN: Farm to Food Assistance CoP Presentation

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Slide 1 (title slide):

Outline:

- TOPIC: Food Systems Change: Moving along the continuum from charity to justice to rights to food sovereignty - where do we fit in - how do we move along this path - and how does F2FA support moving along the continuum

SLIDE 2:

Contradictions in the food banking economy	
Dominant Narrative	Reality
Food banks have been in existence for more than 50 years and have grown in number and size.	The number of food insecure households has steadily increased, as has a racialized gap between the rich and the poor.
Hunger will always be with us so charity will always be necessary.	Charity alone will never end hunger. The root cause of hunger is POVERTY: low wages, job insecurity, and erosion of social services and entitlements, particularly for BIPOC communities.
Food corporations have a major role to play in ending hunger. Walmart and Sam’s Club are Feeding America’s largest donors with more than \$240 million in investments and 7.5 billion pounds of food donated over the last 20 years.	\$85 million of the total investment made to food banks was raised directly from Walmart’s customers. Meanwhile, Walmart takes in the most food stamp dollars among retailers: an estimated 18 percent of taxpayers’ dollars allocated to SNAP last year, equal to \$13 billion, or about 4 percent of Walmart’s total U.S. sales.

<p>Volunteers are celebrated at food banks for serving up kindness. 51% of all food programs in the U.S. relied on volunteers in 2022. Worldwide the number of volunteers providing local hunger relief increased by 28% over the previous year – an all-time high.</p>	<p>For many, volunteering provides a moral safety valve for a society coming to terms with the dismantling of the welfare state. Volunteering often reinforces class and racial divides, especially if volunteer training does not include discussion about the root causes of hunger.</p>
<p>Food Waste = feeding people and saving the planet, “a win-win” for society.</p>	<p>Large-scale food waste is an inevitable outcome of the competition, speed, and growth-driven market mechanisms which rely on overproduction to generate profit at the expense of people and the environment.</p>

- These contradictions (among others) became more palpable during COVID. It is precisely a temporarily strengthened social safety net in 2020 (Pandemic EBT, etc.) that accounted for the short-lived nature of the mid-2020 spike in food insecurity, especially among those who found themselves for the first time in need of emergency provisions due to the pandemic. Real time tracking from the Census Bureau throughout 2020 confirms that cash payments from the federal government directly to citizens in need softened the blow of a sudden stagnant economy that left many people already living on the margins and out of work -- giving credence to the analysis that poverty is indeed the root cause of food insecurity and that, when provided with cash assistance, needy families will spend it on meeting their basic needs.

SLIDE 3:

- Yet food banks continue to occupy a mythic role in the popular imagination as the primary way in which needy people get food and the best way to help fight hunger, with more than 51 percent of all food access programs relying entirely on volunteers.
- What did COVID do for our debates, conversations and understanding of how to end hunger in this country:
 - Since the March 2020 outbreak of COVID in the U.S., we have witnessed the private charitable food system pushed to its limits.
 - For the first time since the Great Depression, the issue of hunger in the U.S. arguably became discernible to all. News stories across the country showed miles-long lines of cars and people snaking around sidewalks and car parks to receive pre-packed boxes and bags of food.
 - Food insecurity and its attendant issues, such as poor health related to racial disparities, were front and center in the public dialogue as growing numbers of “newly hungry” people during COVID found themselves accessing emergency assistance because of job loss – especially those who could not work remotely -- delayed stimulus checks and other disruptions to income.

SLIDE 4:

Back to the contradictions:

We cannot dismantle food banks in the face of the staggering increase of food insecurity. AND we believe in our vision for a world without hunger that includes abundance for everyone where food access and sustainable farming are interdependent; where income is stable and rapid response mechanisms are in place for true emergencies; where people have self-determination and the earth can heal.

Though mitigating food insecurity by capturing and distributing food waste is still at the heart of food banking, many organizations have expanded their strategies to include nutrition education, medically tailored meals, client choice, support in helping clients get access to government nutrition programs, gardening and food preservation classes, policy and advocacy to improve federal nutrition programs

And a smaller but growing subset are beginning to address root causes of food insecurity as part of their strategy to end hunger, such as low wages, poor working conditions, and structural racism. Still, many are beginning to engage more deeply with food sovereignty and food justice coalitions. And yet, others are still wary of politicizing their work for fear of losing access to resources essential to the smooth execution of their feeding operations.

Slide 5:

Food banking is at a crossroads. Arguably food banks have less power in determining the food system than Feeding America, which has less power in determining the food system than the corporate food and agriculture sector. **Yet, Food Banks and local food charities are also capable of meaningfully confronting that power because they now occupy such a central role in what has become an essential part of maintaining the food waste-to-hunger relief supply chain that large food corporations and agribusiness increasingly rely on to maintain the status quo.**

If we want to leverage F2FA – as a program and a model -- in support of a shift from the need for emergency food access to self-determined communities participating in local and regional food and farm economies, we might imagine a continuum that we can move along.

What does the continuum look like? Let's start with the assumption that: The purpose of our food system should be to produce food, health, and well-being. Instead of the food system we have: one that centers private enterprise and wealth accumulation and reproduces racialized poor health outcomes, limited access to arable land, and food insecurity.

And let's start with a shared analysis that (1) poverty, not lack of food or access to food, is the root cause of hunger; and (2) a corporate-controlled food system ensures industry profit - not healthy people; and (3) that the approach to hunger depends too deeply on food charity.

Let's start with the shared analysis that we will never "foodbank" our way out of hunger.

SLIDE 6:

- Charity is the donation of something, like money or food or services, to a cause or person in need.
- Justice: "Individuals should be treated the same, unless they differ in ways that are relevant to the situation in which they are involved." (Aristotle)

Let's take a look at how things shift as we move along the continuum from charity to justice.

- a. What's the problem/what are we trying to solve for?
- b. Who are the main actors/entities involved?
- c. What's the theory of change – what needs to happen to bring about the change in the problem?
- d. What are the outcomes, results, what are the indicators that our response is working?

SLIDE 7:

- The Right to Food is a call to action and a legal framework for coordinated reform in food, agriculture, health, labor, and the environment.

As defined by the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in General Comment 12: "Right to adequate food is realized when [everyone], alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement."

- Food sovereignty is a food system in which the people who produce, distribute, and consume food also control the mechanisms and policies of food production and distribution. This stands in contrast to the present corporate food regime, in which corporations and market institutions control the global food system.
- Let's continue to move along the continuum and understand how things shift.

SLIDE 8:

Pause for a public service announcement: It's up to us!

Slide 9:

For Discussion: JAM BOARD

- *How can we balance the tension between the current need for food charity, including destigmatizing its use, while working towards its eradication?*
- *Where does Farm to Food Assistance fit into the continuum from charity to justice... Or how could it? What programmatic features would turn it into a lever for systems change, propelling us to move along the continuum?*

Ideas to share:

- Political education for staff and volunteers

- Joining FCWA and Fight for \$15 campaigns
- Paying farmers fair wages
- Paying staff fair wages
- Unionizing
- Shift the narrative – narrative change campaigns

Slide 10:

Resources:

Networks and shared learning:

[The National Right to Food Community of Practice](#)

[Closing the Hunger Gap](#)

[Poor People’s Campaign](#)

[The HEAL Food Alliance](#)

[The National Black Food and Justice Alliance](#)

Strategies and Tools:

[The Next Shift](#) (toolkit and conversation guide)

[Center for Story-based Strategy](#)

[Organizing Engagement: Storytelling Project Model](#)

People’s Implementation Guide to the Right to Food (forthcoming in Spring 2024)

END



WHO WE ARE: Formed in early 2021, the [National Right to Food Community of Practice](#) (NRtF CoP) is a growing network of community organizers, food and farm organizations, small scale food producers, those directly impacted by hunger, advocates, researchers and legal experts,

focused on shared learning and capacity building among those advocating for the Right to Food at a local, state or regional level.

WHAT WE DO: Our network develops tools for political education, narrative change and advocacy rooted in a human rights framework that addresses the root causes of hunger at the intersection of racial, housing, climate, land, and economic justice. We are **organizing and building power** by weaving together right-to-food initiatives at state and local levels to facilitate shared learning among organizers towards a national movement for the Right to Food. We are **shifting the narrative** by challenging the idea that charity is an adequate solution to hunger and climate change, and instead, lifting up justice and human rights as the only “true” solution. We are **learning globally** by establishing linkages with social movements, networks, research institutions and human rights organizations to learn about and adapt tactics and tools to further efforts to enshrine the right to adequate food and nutrition in U.S. law and policy, and to contribute to the global struggle for the right to adequate food and nutrition.

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SOURCES (not exhaustive):

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- <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/05/new-household-pulse-survey-shows-concern-over-food-security-loss-of-income.html>
- Joshua Lohnes, [The Contested Politics of Food Banking in the United States](#)
- <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41055-022-00099-y>
- <https://wfpc.sanford.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2022/05/Survey-COVID-19-Pandemic-Impact-on-Hunger-Relief-Organizations-DukeWFPC-WhyHunger-April2022.pdf>