Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Reimagined in America: What Can the World Teach Us About Building a Culture of Health?

Episode 9: Advancing Food Justice

Webinar Transcript

On the March 5, 2021, episode of RWJF's Reimagined in America: What Can the World Teach Us About Building a Culture of Health? webinar series, Malik Yakini of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network and Barbara Gemmill-Herren of the "Beacons of Hope" report and Prescott College, joined RWJF Senior Director Karabi Acharya, ScD, to discuss what communities in the United States can learn from around the world about advancing food justice.

A full transcript of the discussion can be found below.

Please note: Transcripts are produced by a third-party transcription service and may contain discrepancies.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Hello, and thank you for joining us for this episode of Reimagined in America. I'm Karabi Acharya and I lead the Global Ideas for U.S. Solutions team here at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. I'm really excited for today's webinar on what we can learn from the world about Advancing Food Justice.

When we started this series, four years ago, we didn't know how it would be received, it was a bit of an experiment. And I'm excited to say that this is our ninth episode, and we are going strong. We had close to 2000 people registered for today's webinar. We've had an engaged audience from the beginning, and it keeps growing. We've explored what we can learn from the world about social isolation, empowering youth, investing in nature, and so much more.

Check out the link in the chat and head over to our website to learn more about the series. If this is your first episode, then welcome. If you've been here before, it's great to see you again. Closed Captions are available for this webinar. To turn them on, just press the CC button at the bottom of your screen.

So, before we start, let me run through a few quick logistics. You're welcome to use the chat. But if you have a question, we ask you to use the Q&A button, that's at the bottom of your screen. That's where we'll be looking for any questions to our speakers. The webinar is being recorded and you'll all be receiving a recording in your inbox.

Our webinars typically end after about an hour, and this one will, too. But we found that we're always in the middle of a great conversation. So, we're going to try something new today. And after party of sorts, we know that many of you will need to drop off after an hour. But for those of you who want to continue the conversation a little bit longer, we'll keep the line open for another 30 minutes, and continue the Q&A with our speakers.

So, let's dive in. Now, as we all know, the pandemic has exposed many fault lines in the United States. The inequities that too often live below the surface have been bubbling up for all to see. And nowhere has this been more clear than with our food system. As people lost jobs, households went hungry, and we realized just how many families depend on schools to feed children all across America.

And at the same time, food rotted in the fields, millions of gallons of milk were dumped, and workers making low wages at grocery stores, meatpacking plants, and farms put their health, their lives at risk to keep our shelves stocked. COVID-19 has been a

wakeup call that we need to build a new food system, one that is sustainable, equitable, and resilient.

We're not alone in this problem. Around the world, food systems are broken at all levels, a result of how interconnected we all really are. The good news is there's lots of innovation and creative problem solving happening both here in the U.S. and around the world. And that's what we're going to talk about today, how communities around the world are transforming local food systems, what we can learn from them as we undertake our own efforts to foster food sovereignty, creating a system where people have control over what they eat, where it's from, and how it's grown.

But before I turn it over to our speakers, I want to take a minute to hear from all of you. We have two questions that you should see on your screen, and if you could just click on your answers. So, the first question is, how do you see your own community fostering food sovereignty and improving health? And check all that apply.

And then you can scroll down for the second question, which is why did you join today's webinar? And again, check all that apply. So, just take a minute to take that poll. And Kyle, let us know when we're ready to see the results.

POLL

- **How do you see your own community fostering food sovereignty and improving health? *(Check all that apply)***

    - Making stronger links between nutrition and health
    - Providing emergency assistance (e.g., food banks, donations, etc.)
    - Improving access to healthy foods for all (e.g., grocery stores, food co-ops, school meals, etc.)
    - Food marketing and advertising
    - Community-owned food production (e.g., community gardens and farming, etc.)
    - Government assistance programs (e.g., SNAP, WIC, etc.)
    - Food worker justice
    - Policymaking (e.g., local food policy councils)
    - Creating opportunities for food choice and respecting food traditions
    - Other

- **Why did you join today's webinar? *(Check all that apply)***
    - I want to know more about advancing food sovereignty
    - I'm looking for solutions that I can bring to my own community
    - I want to understand how we can learn from other countries

PRODUCER: Kyle McLoughlin, Burness:

We're at about 70% responding, I'll leave the poll up for another 30 seconds or so.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Okay, great.

PRODUCER: Kyle McLoughlin, Burness:

Poll's closing in 10 seconds, so please take the time to fill it out now.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

All right, let's see those results. Great. So, how are people and how's your own community fostering food sovereignty in improving health? Number one answer, providing emergency assistance. Such a critical issue at this moment, that's 72%. Looks like 68% are improving access to healthy foods for all through grocery stores and co-ops.

Great mix, and then others are making stronger links between nutrition and health, community-owned food production, which is great. And then why did you join today's webinar? About 76% want to know more about advancing food sovereignty, 67% looking for solutions to bring to your own community, and 62% want to learn from other countries. That is awesome. That's great.

All right. Well, I'm super excited to introduce our two speakers, who I'm confident will give you plenty of food for thought, pun intended. Malik Yakini is the co-founder and executive director of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, where he

works to foster food sovereignty in his city, and with leaders from Black communities around the world.

The organization works to both transform and give people ownership of their food systems. His organization operates a seven-acre farm, which is the largest in Detroit, and it's also opening a co-op grocery store in Detroit's North End. Through his work, Malik has exchanged ideas with farmers from Malawi who are advancing gender equality, and which I'm excited to hear more about today. One of these conversations is featured in an upcoming film “The Ants and the Grasshopper”, which is coming to a small screen near you soon.

Barbara Gemmill-Herren is the lead author of the Beacons of Hope report spearheaded by the Global Alliance for the Future of Food. This project looks at the power and potential of food systems around the world to understand what solutions really work. The report features 21 case studies from a grassroots farmer's initiative in Cuba to a program supporting rural agricultural communities in Ethiopia.

Barbara and her colleagues also developed a toolkit that outlines what other communities can learn from these Beacons of Hope. Barbara is also an associate faculty at Prescott College. She spent 11 years as a program officer for the Food and Agriculture Association of the United Nations, leading work on ecological approaches to agriculture. Welcome, and thanks to both of you for being here.

So, I'm going to kick off with a couple of questions of my own and then we will turn to questions from the audience. So, please remember, you can submit a question at any time by clicking on the Q&A button on the top of the screen. So, with that, let's begin.

So, Barbara, I'll turn the first question to you. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed how fragile our food system is. Grocery store shelves were empty, prices soared, long lines for food pantries, and schools struggling to deliver meals to students who are learning from home. So, obviously, the U.S. needs to build a more sustainable food system. For what practices or approaches from around the world could we learn from?

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College & Lead Author of the “Beacons of Hope” report

Thank you. Thank you very much. Great question. So, I would just say we have seen firsthand and close up how very brittle our food systems are in the face of COVID-19

pandemic. But as a society, we have very little sense of food and nutrition as being a public good that we should not be sitting around a table where some have way too much to eat, others have far too little or only have food that's been processed so much to be empty of nutrition.

Now in a time of crisis, even that illusion of a table has been taken away, as we're required to have greater distances between us. But I would argue that it has also been a time to reconsider those distances. If I could have the first slide, to create new paths of connection. The world's food and agriculture systems are not functioning well. We know this. Globally, 11% of the world's population remains undernourished, while 25% of the population is overweight. The trends are not positive, hunger is increasing globally since 2015.

And this is not just in the global south, it's important to reckon that North America and Europe have unacceptably high levels of food insecurity, as is seen in the small graphic on the right, clearly linked to a globalized, disconnected food system. Farmers around the world are hurting badly. A good example right now is in India where farmers have been protesting for months against moves to make them painfully vulnerable to the vagaries of the market.

There's a large consensus that there's much that is just fundamentally wrong with our current forms of agriculture and food systems, not meeting the needs of farmers, rural communities, the environment, nor consumers. So, a prevailing solution space that has long been embraced by farming and social movements in the global south is the sphere of agro-ecology, which means applying ecological principles to agriculture, and ensuring a regenerative use of natural resources and ecosystem services, while and this is important, it's indivisible, also addressing the need for socially equitable food systems within which people can exercise their choice over what they eat, and how and where it is produced.

In general, the solutions that have been rising even more over the pandemic is that food systems should deliver not just material well-being, but social well-being within the communities, and foster stronger relationships among people, between people in nature. An important part of changing our food system is when we understand ourselves as part of that larger hole. It doesn't just end at the farm and the community, it goes on to society as a whole.

And seeing that we, as a human society, are just one species among many, and we have an innate interdependence among all living and nonliving things. If we want to have human relationships as the basis of our connections, we need food systems that embrace trust and kindness, and courage. Unfortunately, most government programs and a reliance on markets to shape food systems are inherently impersonal. They remove that direct human relationship between food, communities and nature.

But most encouragingly, I would say, there have been some outstanding beacons of hope, as we call them, that have worked and often succeeded to transform food systems into networks of human connection. A few years ago, I worked with a team at the Biovision Foundation in Switzerland, and the Global Alliance for the Future of Food to identify a good set of around 20 such initiatives and share their stories on how they were able to gain some traction in transforming their food systems and address challenges.

So, I'll highlight two of these very briefly, the work of the Soils, Food and Healthy communities project in Malawi and the food security program of Belo Horizonte as a manifestation of Brazil's National Policy for Agro-ecology and Organic production.

If I could have the next slide, please. The Soils, Food and Healthy Communities project in Malawi is an initiative that I think very interestingly, it originated with child health experts in the local hospitals. And it evolved into a focus on farmer agro-ecology projects. At a time when Malawi was really struggling with major malnutrition problems, the government approach was to focus on imports and subsidies of chemical fertilizers. But this only masked and sometimes exasperated the underlying issue of declining soil fertility.

Then it was the nurses in local hospitals who understood that the children they were treating for severe malnutrition needed above all greater protein in their diets. Broaching these issues to farmers and integral part of their communities, the farmers joined in a project to try the intercropping of legumes rather than using chemical fertilizers. These legume crops, such as pigeon pea, helped improve soil fertility, increase maize yields and rotation, increase soil cover and also became an important dietary component for farm families.

But the project did not stop there. The farmers and the researchers working together with farmers identify the issues and barriers to broader improvements in family health and income issues often related to gender and other social inequities, child feeding practices and HIV-AIDS that serve as barriers. By integrating agricultural and social

solutions, using community educational strategies, the SFHC, Soils, Food and Healthy Communities project was able to address underlying issues that block the effectiveness of the food system to a secure social well-being.

So, a key theme here is the essential human connection between health care givers and farmers which lead to a far deeper societal integration with a strong and supple structure that can better withstand the shocks and nurture communities. If I might have the next slide.

This is in Brazil. An impressive example comes from public policy in Brazil, and its actual implementation in localities, such as the city of Belo Horizonte in Southeastern Brazil. And again, the impetus for these actions arose not around the government negotiation or corporate boardroom results national policy for agro-ecology and organic production was created only after the so-called March of Daisies in 2012, where rural woman demonstrated for sustainable rural development, gender equality and a better life condition for rural populations.

An inspiration for such policies in Brazil as well as globally has been the program in Belo Horizonte, that sought to address food security by increasing the city's reliance and connection to small scale agri-ecological farmers in the farm region around the city. The program adopted a strategy to strengthen rural urban links focusing on delivery of high-quality foods to the urban poor through farmers markets, subsidize vendors, a school meal program and a food bank.

And they included some innovations such as people's restaurants, which source on weekends. The food is required to be provided at 20 to 50% below market price in exchange for the opportunity to sell food in other more profitable locations.

So, to support local farms, the city government purchases popular restaurant ingredients from local family farms at subsidized prices. The program has been a success despite many challenges, and has inspired zero hunger goals nationally and internationally. And the key theme here, again, has been drawing those between skill and resource poor agroecological farmers and the urban poor, such that both of them are enriched.

Thank you. That would be my suggestion of lessons we can learn.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Thanks so much, Barbara. That's fantastic. Let me turn to you, Malik. As you know, Detroit has a network of urban farms and a vibrant food culture. And yet still many Detroiters go hungry, particularly Black residents. And the pandemic has only made food insecurity in the city worse. Malik, you've been working with Detroit's Black Community to address these inequities and you're using a creative approach from Malawi to organize members of the black community to play a more active leadership role in developing a local sustainable food system.

So, can you just tell us a little bit more about that?

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

First of all, thank you. It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you, Barbara, for that wonderful presentation. So, let me first set a little context, and say that Detroit is a city which has been in the news a lot over the last decade or so usually for not really good stuff, usually for the financial situation of the city. And as most people know, Detroit really made its mark on the world in the last century as the automobile capital of the world. But as the U.S. domination of the global auto market began to decline, so did the economy of Detroit.

And Detroit was basically a one horse town. The entire economy was based around the auto industry, and the industries that fit into the auto industry. So, the decline of the U.S. share of the auto industry had a tremendously detrimental effect on the City of Detroit. That combined with the changing demographics in the City of Detroit.

So, in 1950, Detroit had about 1.9 million people at its height. And currently it has about 675,000 people. So, we have a tremendous problem in that we have less than half the population that we had 65 or 70 years ago or so, but the size of the city is still the same. The infrastructure still needs to be maintained. Parks need to be cut. Snow needs to be plowed, and so on.

So, this leaves the city in a tremendously fragile situation, trying to figure out how to maintain the infrastructure. Of course, the rates of poverty are very high in the city of Detroit. In fact, about 30% of the population lives at or below the federal poverty level. So, just to set some context, now because of that, in Detroit, there has been a tremendous urban agricultural movement.

In fact, probably, we have the most robust urban agriculture movement in the United States. In large part, due to the tremendous amount of unused land in the City of Detroit, that, again, has tied to the poverty rate and also frankly, it's tied to what we call the 1960s white flight to the tremendous number of people who identify themselves as White who left the City of Detroit in the beginning of the 1950s, but accelerating in the 1960s, and continuing in the decades after that.

So, that's the context that we work in. And then Detroit Black Community Food Security Network is concerned about the impact of those social conditions on food and nutrition for Detroiters. And so, when my friend and comrade Raj Patel reached out to me after he looked at the work that we and others were doing in the City of Detroit, and saw some parallels between our work, and a film he was working on about some farmers in Malawi, I jumped on the opportunity to try to make those connections.

And so, we've had this mutual learning exchange between Anita and Esther, two women farmers in Malawi, and between some of the farmers in the City of Detroit. So, Esther and Anita actually got a chance to come to Detroit and visit D-Town Farm and see some of the techniques that we're using, and in fact, took some of those things back to Malawi. And then there's some things that we've been able to learn from them that we are applying in the City of Detroit.

So, some of the main lessons that we've learned have to do with the relationship between food, climate, and the social environment in which people are functioning. And so, we know that one of the causes of hunger both in Malawi and in Detroit has to do with the tremendous disparity in wealth that is created by the global system of capitalism, and by the legacy of colonialism and slavery, that still affects the majority Black population in Detroit, and the population of Malawi.

And so, we learned a lot about how folks in Malawi are able to organize themselves to respond to some of the conditions that they're facing. And in particular from watching Raj Patel's movie, “The Ants and the Grasshopper”, we saw how farmers in Malawi, Anita and Esther, were able to attack gender inequality issues through the use of food. And specifically, in the movie, they show a transformation of some of the protagonists, some of the men in the movie, who felt it, cooking and preparing food was women's work, and that if their friends ever saw them doing that, that they would be demeaned.

But by the end of the film, we see that one of the main protagonists, Winston has completely changed and is helping his wife with food preparation and cooking. And so,

the main takeaway is how they were able to use the social organization within their society to change norms, and to change habits, which address both food insecurity, and addressed gender roles.

And so, as we look at what Malawi has to offer, I don't think it's so much that there's some really, really innovative agricultural technology that we're taking from that. But it's more that we're learning from the social experience of people in Malawi. And similarly, the social experience that people throughout the global south. One of the detrimental aspects to this global system of White supremacy is that it minimizes our understanding of the cultural wisdom, the historical experiences of people of color throughout the world.

And so, we don't have access to the tremendous lessons that are buried within that cultural wisdom. And so, again, one of the main takeaways is that in order to have a fair and just food system, that we also have to have the political will, the economic will, and the political and economic systems that allow us to gain access to the wisdom, the Indigenous wisdom, which is in the cultures of Black and Brown people throughout the world.

It's my view that embedded within that cultural wisdom are many of the solutions to the problems that the western world is facing today. There's other aspects of this and surely there's similarities between the work we're doing in Detroit, in Malawi, and there's large differences. Clearly, Malawi is a predominantly rural country with about 80% of the population being small scale farmers. Detroit, of course, is a highly urbanized city, where very few people are farming and most people are dependent upon the industrial food system for their food.

Also, the life expectancy is tremendously different. In Malawi, the average life expectancy is about 64, slightly higher for women, slightly lower for men. We still have about 20% of the deaths in Malawi being attributed to HIV and AIDS. So, again, a tremendously different social system, and circumstances, but a number of lessons that we can learn not only from the people in Malawi, but that the Western world can also learn from the other Black and Brown peoples in the global south around the world.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

That's great. Thank you so much, Malik. Really interesting to hear that work. We just have a few minutes before I want to turn to the audience Q&A. We're getting lots of

questions. And as a reminder, if you have a question, please put it in the Q&A button in the Zoom.

So, my last question to you both, this is for both of you, is what advice do you have for local U.S. communities and policymakers who are striving to achieve food justice? And, Barbara, if you want to just take a couple of minutes, and then Malik, I'll turn to you.

I think you're still muted, Barbara. There.

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College & Lead Author of the "Beacons of Hope" report

Okay. Is that okay?

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Yeah.

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College & Lead Author of the "Beacons of Hope" report

I'm there with you. Okay. I don't know why that happened. But thank you. Great questions again. Yeah. So, I know we're short on time. So, I think I would just like to stress that there are several key lessons from the Beacons of Hope initiatives about what works when it comes to reimagining food systems. And some of the strongest elements that came out among the 20 initiatives that we profiled were their use of co-creation of knowledge. This concept of really respecting and developing knowledge among all involved, not just experts.

Another route, and Malik stresses, is developing cooperative ownership models, and building circular economies that reinforce relationships between producers and consumers, and all of those in between. And to translate that into concrete proposals in the U.S. context, I, which just mentioned, I have a great respect for proposals put forward by John Ikerd, an emeritus professor at the University of Missouri, where he suggests that we should see food as a public utility.

Public utilities are well understood in the U.S. We depend on them for water, sewage, electricity, a whole range of things for which we have public utilities. And the reason to

have them is to separate those things that are essential public services from the vagaries of the market. That's what we need to address. That's how we need to address food access in this country.

If we're going to solve food security, we need to say everyone has a right to good healthy food. And we're going to find a way to ensure this through a system that's not at the whim of markets. We need to build such utilities recognizing that it won't feed people unless it is a personal system where there's a sense of connection between the people producing the food, and those receiving the food and those all along the chain. And the examples from Malawi and Brazil show us that this can be done.

Thanks.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Great. Malik, what are your thoughts, advice for local U.S. communities and policymakers striving to achieve food justice?

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

Sure. Well, the first thing I would say is that we need to address the root causes. Often in American society, we like addressing symptoms. And we can continue addressing symptoms for the next 500 years and never solve the problem. In fact, a friend of mine, Dora Cooper, says that you only get correct answers if you ask correct questions. And so, I would suggest that one of the first steps in figuring out how to have a fair and just food system in the United States is asking the fundamental questions about why we see vast inequalities and inequity in the system.

And they have to do with the question of land, which is a very difficult question, because a lot of people don't want to face the reality that the United States is a settler colony. The United States is a settler colony. And the fact that it has occupied this land for 250 years or so, or more, does not change the fact that it's the settler colony. And that the Indigenous people were dispossessed of their land, Africans were enslaved in this land, and later, dispossessed of the land they had acquired, and these are some of the root factors that are causing food insecurity.

And so, if we're serious about rooting out the problem, we have to address the fundamental causes of the problem. Another fundamental cause of the problem has to do with the concentration of capital in the hands of men, usually, who are identified as White. And so, the lack of access to capital also strangles communities as they're even trying to put in place the types of localized food systems that are necessary in order to create more self-reliant communities.

The reality is that we're not just trying to create food security, but we really want, as Barbara mentioned, to create food sovereignty. We're not just concerned about people having enough to eat, but we're also concerned about people having control of the systems that provide their food and defining those systems. So, they're really exercising agency and shaping their own destiny.

I would agree with Barbara that we need to look at things like co-ops on all levels, farmers and producers' co-ops, distribution co-ops, consumer co-ops, such as the Detroit People's Food Co-op, that we're building in the City of Detroit. We certainly need to look at how we can build strong, resilient, more localized food systems and break away from the industrial food system that has a stranglehold on us now. One of the things that we should look at is the power of institutional buying on municipal governments, on colleges, universities, churches have tremendous buying power.

And if they begin to shift that power away from the industrial food system to support small scale, regenerative, sustainable, local initiatives will be a lot farther along towards having food justice. Of course, we are huge supporters of urban agriculture, because in the United States, now, most people are concentrated in urban areas. And so, it makes more sense, both in terms of getting nutrient, dense food to people quickly, and also in terms of doing the least harm to the environment, to grow food closer to where we have centers of population density.

We need to have, as we're thinking about how to create a more fair and just food system, emphasis on policy as well. And so, Food Policy Councils, both on the local municipal level and the state level are very important. And there's been efforts over the last few years to really think about how we impact the food, the Farm Bill, I'm sorry, on a national level, so that we really make fundamental shifts in power.

And so, that takes a coalition building broadly across all kinds of divisions that we normally have, so that we see our greater interest as being of more value than the differences that we have.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Yeah, yeah. Thanks so much, Malik. Well, there are a ton of questions from the audience. So, that's wonderful. So, let me turn to some of those. There are a few questions around engaging the community. Both of you have spoken to the importance of engaging the community in a variety of ways. And so, the couple of questions around, what are your tips or what are the most successful methods that you've seen around community engagement? And if you have thoughts about how to do that, particularly in the context of the pandemic, when it can't be in person, please share those.

So, that question is to both of you. So, whoever would like to chime in first. Barbara, you can go.

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College & Lead Author of the "Beacons of Hope" report

So, really excellent. Really, his inventory of different vehicles that can be used is fantastic. And I think he did a very good summary of it. And the stress is he would put in, and I would put is always on community organization and the social outreach. I think there were some questions about how were the farmers reached in Brazil, where they already part of the food system, or did they need to bring them into the food system? They certainly were there, but they weren't connected with the people in the cities.

And so, working out those connections, and those links in between, is really a key for the transformation. And I do think the point about Local Food Councils is something that is a really important issue and is growing within the U.S. And I think all of these changes will begin on a local level, and politicians will feel the heat arising and, and come to see how important it is to make the changes.

But I think on a local level, using the examples of Malawi and Brazil, when you get the people involved in health, involved with the people involved in food, and those are the logical characters to be in a Local Food Policy Council, it can be incredibly powerful. And, for example, outcomes from Brazil is that 75% fewer children are hospitalized from malnutrition in areas where these programs have been put in place. And that's tremendous. That really isn't a statistic that would impact everyone. So, yeah, I think it's the social connection.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Yeah, thank you. And that is a powerful statistic. Malik, I'm curious what you would add to what you said earlier, and particularly around challenges that you've seen. What are the big challenges you've seen around engaging the community?

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

So, let me say that one of the big challenges I think we have in the United States in general is that Americans are, in a sense, insulated from the realities of the food system. The average person in America doesn't even use the term food system, right? That's not how they're thinking. They're thinking about, there's certain items I want to consume, I go to the store, I buy them, and I prepare them and eat them. And that's it, or maybe go to a restaurant.

But people aren't thinking about this whole chain of activities that forms what we call the food system. So, I think raising awareness about how food gets to our plate is one of the fundamental tasks that we have to do, so people even have an understanding of what we're talking about when we talk about the food system. So, that's one of the big challenges in America where the wealth that the country has isolates us and insulates us to some degree from the realities that other people around the world have to face.

So, I'll say from my experience, one of the things I would advise people not to do, often what we see because race is such a factor in the United States. And that race is tied to concentration of wealth. What we often see is that people who are defined as White coming into Black and Brown communities in the United States, doing work that might be described as food justice, food security, or food sovereignty work.

And so, our position as an organization is that while we certainly value White allies, that we are not looking for saviors, and that we don't need anyone else to come into our community, and give us the solutions to our problems, that we believe deeply, that the solutions every community faces are embedded within those communities. And then what we really need are the resources funneled to those communities so that the visionary leadership that already exists in those communities can manifest. And so,

that's one of the things that I would suggest that we look at in terms of solving these challenges of community engagement.

COVID has presented some particular problems. In our case, we typically, there's two major projects we're working on in Detroit, the D-Town Farm, which is a seven-acre farm that we operate, and we're building a building that will house the Detroit people's food co-op, a cooperatively-owned grocery store, which currently has about 1200 member owners, and we're scheduled to begin construction in the next few months.

So, we have these two major projects that we're working on that we call self-determination projects. And really what we're doing is we're modeling for our community, how we can take the resources, the knowledge that we have ourselves, and we can begin to exert our own life energies to have some control over the system that provides our food. So, we would advance that to grassroots from inside the community leadership, community self-determination projects as a way of advancing a more sustainable just in regenerative food system.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Thanks so much, Malik. And so-

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

If I can just add?

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Yeah, go ahead.

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

The COVID adjustment. For our farm, we typically sell at farmers markets. Those markets did not open last year. And so, of course, we had to do much of the selling online, and much of our community engagement has also gone online in order to protect the members of our organization who are doing community organizing. So, that has presented some particular challenges.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Yeah, yeah. You've both spoken quite eloquently about tapping into the wisdom of communities, that wisdom is there. And one of the questions that came in is, and you were beginning to speak to this, both of you, I think, is how does that level up to higher levels of the system? So, the specific question is, what can we do to bring Indigenous agricultural knowledge to our industrial system?

So, taking it out of maybe the community level into those larger mass production systems. Barbara, go ahead.

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College & Lead Author of the "Beacons of Hope" report

Yeah, I can give a first attempt to that. Yeah. And still stressing that the most important things will happen on the local level. But Malik mentioned the Farm Bill, and our system of agriculture here in the U.S. is very much determined by the Farm Bill. And there are certain provisions within it that recognize, now the USDA is doing quite a bit more in recognizing, say Black farmers and Indigenous farmers and, and so forth. But it's a very, very small portion of the funding that goes through the Farm Bill.

And so, and the bulk of the funding does promote industrial agriculture where farmers are given incentives that they almost can't resist to farm from fence row to fence row with corn and soy. And yet they're not necessarily benefiting all that much from it. Certainly, our nutrition, our children are not benefiting from it.

So, the idea of really reforming food policy in the U.S. beginning with the Farm Bill, I think is critically important. And it's really important that people don't feel like this is beyond them, that they can engage with it, that they contact their local politicians and understand how it affects agriculture in every state in the U.S. It's unfortunate that what is given to the agriculture we want to see is really very minimal compared to what's given to industrial agriculture.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Malik, what would you add to that?

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

So, I think the answer to that question depends in part on what one's theory of change is. And so, some people have a theory of change that supposes that it happens from the top down. We don't believe that. We think that change bubbles up from the ground level. And so, that's where we do the majority of our work. Ultimately, a system rests upon the consent of people to abide by that system.

And so, part of what we're trying to do is we are trying to shift people's allegiance from the current industrial food system to this new system that we're creating. And so, what we think happens in time is that consciousness grows; that more and more people begin to put their allegiance to these new alternative, well, they're not really new, but alternative methods. Many times they're older methods, that we're readopting. More people put their allegiance to that and pull their allegiance from the old system then the old system begins to weaken, and new things begin to emerge.

So, I mean, that's our fundamental theory of how we work. Now, that's not to say that it's not important to work on the federal level and to change policy. I think it's extremely important. And we have a number of people who are doing that. That's just not the lane of our particular organization. But there's groups such as the HEAL Alliance, which is doing tremendously important work in that regard, the National Black Food and Justice Alliance is doing tremendously important work in regards to the Black Farmers Act.

And we would encourage those kinds of things. But we think the fundamental change really has to do with shifting people's consciousness. And I'll end by saying this that, although systemic change is very difficult, and it occurs over time, the reality is that human consciousness does shift. If we look at, for example, our views on gender now, they are significantly different than they were 20 or 30 years ago.

I grew up in a binary world where that's pretty much how we saw gender. A very few people see gender in that way now. Our consciousness about that has evolved. And similarly with the food system all of them now, most people are very much embedded with the industrial food system. We are seeing some shifts. And I think we'll see in the

coming decades that much of what is considered to be the radical fringe thought today will become the common sense of future decades.

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College & Lead Author of the “Beacons of Hope” report

And I might add, just building on that. I mean, I just feel that the centrality of gender is so critical. And I had mentioned the statistics to you before, but when we look at, what are those things that have contributed most to addressing reducing malnutrition? Over a long longitudinal study, over 116 countries, 20 years, the most important component was female education.

And we've had this narrative, how are we going to feed the world? We have to ramp up the calories of that, no. It really has so much to do with gender equity. That's the most important contributor and access to safe water. And then other social provisions are also critically important. It's a social problem. It's not a biological problem.

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

Yeah, absolutely. We clearly have the technology and the know how to grow enough food to feed all human beings. The question is whether or not we have the political will. And that starts with really the question of who do we consider to be human? Because access to high quality food is really a human right. So, it's not, I agree totally with Barbara, it's a social question. It's a question of our will to make sure that all human beings have the access to high quality nutrient dense food.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

I'm so glad you brought in the issue of gender equity. So, I want to turn now to another, a few questions, which are really around the opportunity, if you like, of the pandemic. So, one question is around emergency food providers. And I think that there's a tendency that in an emergency situation that you just focus on the immediate needs and really just getting food out to people. So, the question is really how do you build on that momentum and those efforts in ways that then support the larger movement and the larger systemic changes?

And are you seeing opportunities or even examples where people are doing that effectively, where they're, if you like, taking the opportunity of the pandemic to draw attention and action towards creating more equitable food systems?

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College & Lead Author of the "Beacons of Hope" report

I think there is. I totally agree. I'm based in California, in Northern California, out in the country, and there has been a real pivot among the, say, the food banks to find where previously, a lot of the sources of their food were not great. I mean, imported peaches from China, in some of the rural school districts up here where the poor people are growing these things right next door. And now there has been that pivot toward more local production.

So, there is a real opportunity. And is probably, there's also other opportunities as people, I know there's a renewed focus right now on infrastructure in the U.S., and food systems demand and infrastructure. If you're going to have more local food systems, you need to have more ways of having food hubs and being able to share the food more locally, rather than bring it to the biggest city and then up.

So, people have definitely had reason to make those changes. And there would be good opportunities to make them more long-lasting, I think.

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

Yes. So, I'll share a short story and say that, in the beginning of the pandemic, about a year ago, in March and April of 2020, we got more calls from people wanting to start gardens than we got in the last five years, because people saw, as you said, in your introduction, corroborate the fragility of the American food system. And people wanted some alternative. They wanted something where they could have more feel like they were more in control of their food source.

So, really, sometimes circumstances shift consciousness in ways that humans can't intentionally do. Similarly, we found that with the Detroit People's Food Co-op, we had this tremendous surge in membership. We got more members within the first week, between March and August of last year than we had gotten into four years prior to that. We just had this tremendous surge of interest.

And many of the food activists I've talked to, both throughout the United States and in Canada, have experienced a similar surge in interest in these alternative ways of obtaining food. So, I think it does present a tremendous opportunity, because people are really looking at it now in a way they hadn't looked at. But we also have the danger of falling into the trap of thinking that emergency food providers can solve the problem of hunger.

And I think there's a growing consensus that that will not solve the problem of hunger. And that's not to say that we should not provide emergency food because I certainly think it's noble, if people are hungry to provide food for them. But we shouldn't do it with the expectation that that is solving the problem, because it certainly is not. We can continue to get food away for hundreds of years, and never solve the problem of hunger, because again, the problem is not our inability to produce enough food. Our problem is the political will to make sure that everyone has access to high quality food, regardless of their so-called race, religion, national origin, gender, zip code, or a variety of other factors.

So, really, we saw tremendous amounts of money poured into emergency food last year, March, April, May June, in order to respond to the crisis. But we didn't see the same corresponding amount of money put into creating the long-term resilience that communities need. So, they're not so subject to crisis, like the pandemic that we saw, the work that we're currently in. So, really, the question is, I think fundamentally a question of whether or not we're trying to create just food security, or we only try to make sure that people's bellies are full, or are we trying to create food sovereignty?

A situation where really the mechanisms for producing and delivering the food are shaped by the people who are producing the food and the people who are consuming that food.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Such an important point, food security or food sovereignty. Well, we're coming to the end of the webinar part. But as I mentioned, we are having an after party. This has been a great discussion. I think it's safe to say we're learning a lot. And I want to thank you, Barbara and Malik for sharing your wisdom with us.

If folks have time to stick around, we are going to keep the conversation going and get to more of your questions until about 3:00 p.m. Eastern. But before we go into the after-

party conversations, I'm really excited to share a newly launched resource that came from our team, the Blue Marble Quiz. At the foundation, we know that good ideas have no borders. And yet a recent survey from Candid of U.S. Philanthropists found that the vast majority of philanthropists rarely or never look to ideas and solutions from around the globe to inspire or inform their grant making.

And so, that's part of what drove us to develop the Blue Marble Quiz. We want it to serve as a simple, yet powerful tool to help people discover the value of global learning. So, please check out the quiz, take it yourself, share it with everyone you know, share it with your kids, my kids had a fun time taking it. And for those of you who have to leave now, we completely understand. There's a very short survey that will pop up, please take that. We really listen carefully to your feedback. And, of course, we'll make the recording available to everyone.

And with that, the folks who need to drop off, please do so. And otherwise, we will return to more questions from the audience of which we have lots of questions, which is so great. Okay. So, here is a fantastic question, which is, how do we tap into the innovation of youth and young people when advancing food justice? I would love to hear both of your thoughts on that. You want to start, Barbara?

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College & Lead Author of the "Beacons of Hope" report

Malik has probably a lot more direct connection. So, let him start, and then I'll help him.

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

So, one of the things we realized early on, and I work with the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, and we started in 2006. And although in 2006, we were relatively new to the food movement, most of us were already veteran activists in the larger movement for liberation. And so, we brought that experience with us.

One of the things that we realized is that early in our journey, and I'll see early in my journey, as I began to grow into consciousness in the late 1960s, we thought that that fundamental shift in power that we were seeking was something that was going to happen right away, right. The revolution was getting ready to go down and the next year,

too. And so, I think as we matured, we realized that the process of fundamentally shifting power is not only a protracted process, but it's an intergenerational process.

And so, that if we expect to be sustainable, not only in our methods of growing food, but if we expect our movement to be sustainable, we have to intentionally engage young people. And so, it was that thinking that prompted us to start our youth program, the Food Warriors Youth Development Program, in which we teach young people how to build and maintain raised bed gardens. We teach them our food justice and food sovereignty concepts. And everything that we do is rooted in making sure that African-American children have a greater understanding of their own history and culture, and where they fit into their own historical continuum.

And so, I would say it's tremendously important that we intentionally, not only engage young people, but create opportunities for young people to share their genius with us. This is a reality not in by saying this, that I'm 65 years old, and so, I grew up in a world and I was shaped by the world I grew up in. Young people didn't grow up in that world. And not hampered by all of the constraints that perhaps I was hampered by growing up in the '60s and '70s. They have another way of looking at the world.

And that new way of looking at the world is valuable. In fact, we need that in order to create the social and technological innovations that are needed to create justice. So, in every major social movement that youth have been the tip of the spear. And so, we need to not only encourage young people to be involved in transforming the food system, but we need to intentionally create the opportunities for them to plug in real ways so their voices and leadership can have an impact on the overall movement.

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College & Lead Author of the “Beacons of Hope” report

Yeah, I completely endorse that. I think that's a great way of articulating what's needed. I think what we've been trying to look at a bit more at Prescott College is workforce development, of trying to build the workforce for the food system of the future that we need. And I think a large part of that is the whole field of Agronomy say is a fairly White male field.

And finding the ways that young people and people of color can have experiential education in that scope is critically important, that they have those opportunities to really, from an early age, from within high school or in their undergraduate education, being

able to articulate what they see as the needs. With their fresh vision, and being able to, yeah, take on the people who are very fixed in their attitude, as many people in the food world are, in the agricultural world and be able to articulate the need for change, I think is such an engine for making those transitions, finding ways to provide those opportunities.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Yeah, and to a somewhat related question, which is, what are your recommendations around ensuring that you're identifying the right community leaders? What do you look for in community leaders? Who wants to start?

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College & Lead Author of the "Beacons of Hope" report

We have a lot of questions about building leadership. But I think the questions are more important about building community. And I don't think it's necessarily the characteristics of individual people. But that there are organizations that have their arms open to be inclusive, and to listen to each other and co-create knowledge. And I suppose that's a characteristic of a leader being sympathetic to that. But I think it's not vested in individual people, but in the culture of organizations.

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

I would agree with that and say that, yes, we need to move away from this conceptualization of leadership as being individual, and think about how we build broad leadership within communities and build leadership that is a reflection of those communities. The main thing I want to stress again, though, is that we don't need people to parachute into communities. That we have to have faith that every community has within it already the wisdom and intelligence to solve whatever problems that they're faced with. The thing is just to make sure that Indigenous leadership is resourced in order to make those dreams, visions and aspirations manifest themselves.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Yeah. Here's a question which has to do with water. And I think this is an issue both in the U.S. and most definitely globally. So, I'll just read it. In the United States, many rural

and tribal communities are experiencing water scarcity as a result of historically discriminatory practices and policies, what resources can you point to, that can support such communities to still practice community agriculture, to advance food sovereignty, and particularly in the face of climate change?

Barbara, I wonder, in the work that you've done, I imagine that the issues of water and food come together quite a bit.

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College & Lead Author of the "Beacons of Hope" report

They do very well. Yeah. And water, food, and land, and dealing with issues of access and ownership over all of those are really critical issues. And this has played out in many, many countries, but it very much is so in the U.S. Right now, I think, the looming issues of water, and the idea that water is becoming more of a scarce commodity, therefore, it has a huge commercial value, is a real threat. And it's something that I think we should all be keeping an eye on.

And there's nothing that should bring people more around the table together than to talk about water, because it's impacting all of us water and food. But I think those conversations may be going on in ways that we don't always understand. So, I know, within California, we have a Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, the first time ever, that it's been recognized that the groundwater is a public good, and that we need to manage it in a way that is beneficial for everyone.

And there will be a lot of struggles that go along with that. But I think it's a really critical looming issue. And it's not that different from the issues around land ownership as well. And the idea of land being something that has a value, therefore, it has this investment potential that then excludes lots of other people in the whole conversation.

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

Yes, I agree, totally, Barbara, that water is a very assimilation to land. And I just like to raise the issue of colonialism and capitalism, again. Because I think these disparities are rooted in history. One of the things that happens in America is we tend to be a historical, that we just really, American people as a whole, just really don't know that much about history and the slice of history that we know, is usually the sanitized version that has

been fed to us through public schools that presupposes this narrative of European settlers being the saviors and great civilizers.

So, I don't have a specific answer for that in terms of methods that can be used, given the tremendous challenges that we're having with water. I mean, I would say that we can look at various Indigenous cultures and how they have looked at water conservation in minimizing water use, and the systems that have been created in the southwest for water shares. All of those things are valuable. But frankly, what I'm much more interested in is how we dismantle the system of capitalism and the legacy of colonialism that presupposes that water and land are commodities that can be owned by human beings.

I think we've been really tricked into this idea that very wealthy people can own part of the earth. And we've accepted it pretty much without question. It's become part of American culture, and certainly part of American capitalism. But the reality is that the water and the land are commons, they are not owned by any individual. They're here for us to steward for our well-being also for the well-being of the other plants and animals that we share the planet with, and also for the well-being of future generations.

And so, frankly, I'm for the dismantling of the system of capitalism in this case, that suggests that these things are commodities. But even some iterations of socialism, for that matter, see the earth as a commodity. So, it's even broader than capitalism. And so we have some folks now who are identifying themselves as eco-socialists, but they are recognizing again, that the earth is not just a commodity to be extracted from human benefit, but that we live in this matrix of light, and that we have to be careful stewards of the earth, both for our own well-being, the well being of future generations, and the balance of the delicate matrix in life.

So, again, I'm always for getting to the root issues and things. And we have not in any honest way in this country, addressed the issue of colonization, unless address the issue of the occupation of this landmass by people from Europe and the dispossession of the land, dispossession of the native Indigenous inhabitants of this land, and the impact that that has on food sovereignty. We also have not addressed the issue of the dispossession of Black farmers coming out of the era of chattel slavery, and how they were dispossessed of land, often, in terror.

And then also, I want to end by saying that we often talk about history, as we're talking about how we solve these problems. But the harm is ongoing, right? It's not just

historical. Today, we still see the same great disparity in terms of access in so-called ownership of land, water and other resources. And so, the problem, and we're not just addressing something that happened 100 years ago, the problem is ongoing.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Thanks so much for that. And I couldn't agree more about the importance of contextualizing our present based on where we've come from. I think that is absolutely so critical. So, there's a question about language and some of the terms. And I think, we all agree, language is so important. And Malik you've really carefully distinguished a number of terms. And so, and there's an asked for some clarification between food security, food sovereignty.

I would also add in, in our pre-call you mentioned that you don't use the word food desert anymore, the phrase food desert anymore. So, could you speak the language and how you think about those different terms?

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

Sure. So, my friend and comrade, Raj Patel, is on the line now. And I often quote him when addressing this matter, because he says something to me that was really impactful. And he said, "You can have food security in prison." If you think about it, you can have food security in prison. So, food security at its base really means that people have enough food.

Some food activists, the last 20 years or so have embellished that definition and said, it's having enough culturally appropriate food. Some add other factors in terms of how the food was grown. But at its base, food security means that people are not hungry. They have enough to eat. But clearly, we're struggling for more than that. If you can have food security and be in prison, we want much more than that.

So, we're struggling for, frankly, liberation, and for sovereignty. And so, the issue of food sovereignty is really connected to the issue of sovereignty in general. In fact, the hardcore reality is that there is no food justice without social justice. The food system does not operate separately from the other systems in society and globally. It's tied into those systems. And so, in order to have a fair and just food system, we have to impact fairness and justice and society in general.

Again, this is not a question of whether or not we have the knowledge and technology to produce enough food to feed all human beings, it's a question as to whether or not we have the political will, and who we define as being deserving of having access to food and having access to water. So, again, food security is basically addressing hunger, food sovereignty has to do with shaping, defining, controlling the food system by those who are producing and consuming the food.

And of course, you can go to La Via Campesina's website and get a much more extensive definition of what food sovereignty is. And then I'll end by addressing the term food desert, which has also become popular in the last 15 years or so. It's become the term used by the USDA and many food activists have adopted that term. And many of us reject that term for multiple reasons.

One, because most people think of a desert as being a naturally occurring ecosystem, which sometimes that's the case, and sometimes human activity helps to catalyze the creation of deserts. But people think of them as being this naturally occurring ecosystem. And we want to point out with no uncertainty, that the disparity that we see in the food system was intentionally created by human beings.

It's not some naturally created ecosystem that just happened. No. These disparities were created intentionally to give privilege to people who are considered to be White, and particularly for those White people who are considered to be a part of the money class.

So, several people over the last few years, including my dear comrade sisters, Karen Washington, and Dr. Cooper had been advancing the term food apartheid, as a way of describing the food disparities that exist in Black communities. And the term food apartheid captures the intentionality that we see, that reflects the history of redlining of intentional disinvestment, and Black and Brown communities and the other factors that leave our communities often without access to high quality food, and certainly leave us of victims to those who would come in and extract the money that we earn in our communities by setting up stores that are not owned by the people in those neighborhoods, to extract the will.

And so, we're much more in favor of the term food apartheid instead of food deserts.

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College & Lead Author of the "Beacons of Hope" report

And I might just add, I think, Malik, you express this very well, that food people have been working around the terminology of food security and adding, right now, it's considered to be availability, access, use and stability. But those words really, really don't quite capture it. And food sovereignty puts in the human element. And it expressly talks about agency, about people having the right to the choices over what they eat, and how it's produced, and the centrality of the human right to food, which is not yet central to the concept of food security.

But we know that. We know that without having that central tenet of right to food and addressing issues of social equity, you do not arrive at food security. So, the formula is still under development, and it's not there yet. That's why, really, we prefer to use the term food sovereignty.

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

With all of these terms, we have to be careful because the corporate sector has a way of adopting these terms and turning them on their head. And so, we're hearing, we see TV commercials these days about Monsanto being, these great environmental stewards and things like that. So, with all terminology, we just have to be careful. And we have to continually sharpen our analysis and sharpen the terms that are used to express that analysis.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Yeah. And, of course, the terms I think are an indicator and a tool for what you both have talked about in terms of changing consciousness. And there's a question here around what information or arguments do you deploy to raise the consciousness of the average consumer around the current food system, to get them to think about a more locally-grown, collectively-owned food system?

And, I would be curious, Barbara, would you even phrase that issue of raising consciousness the same way in other countries, and some, I would imagine, there's a lot of cultural social differences around, for example, whether people believe everyone has a right to food or some of those basic issues. I would love for you to speak to some of

the cultural diversity you might see around that. And then any tools you've seen folks use.

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College & Lead Author of the "Beacons of Hope" report

I have participated in a number of different Global Dialogues at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the high-level panel on global food security. And I think those terms are very close to most people around the world. It's maybe Americans that are a bit further away from them. I think the idea of both the right to food and access to good food is central to... that's not far away from people's consciousness.

What tends to be prevalent in politicians mind is, we have to have a huge amount of cheap food. And that's something that tends to be embraced by the proponents of industrial agriculture. So, there gets to be this mentality that this is the only way to save someone's political future is by cheap food. And trying to get around that idea that, yes, we need food that is available and accessible to all people. What we need is people to have more equity and more income, and be able to, yeah, to be able to afford good nutritious food.

So, we also deal a fair amount, and this is becoming more of a topic globally is the true cost of food, the fact that there are so many negative externalities involved in cheap food. And that's true around the world as well. So, coming to the, what would be more of a true cost, if you address those externalities along the whole food chain is a concept that I think is complex.

It's something that is very difficult to put on the label of a piece of food. But it's a complexity that I think consumers around the world can understand.

It's a conversation we need to certainly continue. But, yes, it's really within reach, even Americans, I believe.

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

I'll speak from the perspective of my organizing experience in the City of Detroit, which I will acknowledge is a particular experience, there may be some general lessons that can be gleaned from it. And so, in terms of how we reach people, the average person who is

not involved in studying the food system or necessarily an activist, is by crafting the message in a way that really relates to their daily life. And so, there's two things that I found really resonate with Detroit's majority Black community.

The first is the message around health. So, unfortunately, many people in the Black community come to an awareness about changing their own diet as a result of some health crises, either that they faced or someone in their family has faced. And then they realize the role that food has played in creating the health crisis that they're experiencing.

And so, because almost every family experiences that, and in Detroit, we have rates of childhood and adult obesity that are off the charts, rates of diabetes that are off the charts, rates of hypertension and heart disease that are off the charts, all of which are to some degree controllable are certainly impacted by diet. And so, because the health disparities are so wide in the City of Detroit, and so broad, everybody's families experiencing it, those messages usually resonate with people, the lack of health promoting foods available in our community.

The second message that people see that resonates with people is based on something people see every day. And that is the extractive nature of the food economy, the retail economy that we see in the City of Detroit. As I mentioned earlier, Detroit is a city that is about 675,000 people, about 80% of whom are identified as African-American. But there is not one African-American owned grocery store in the City of Detroit.

Right now, the vast majority of the grocery stores in Detroit are owned by an ethnic minority from Iraq, called Chaldeans. And I want to be very clear that this critique is not an attack on Chaldeans. The critique is really an attack on capitalism. It just so happens that in Detroit, Chaldeans are the ethnic group that has been allowed to move in and control the retail food economy.

If you go to L.A. or you go to Chicago, it's another ethnic group. But essentially, the relationship is the same, that some other ethnic group comes in, because they usually have more access to capital, and perhaps more experienced, and also because Black communities have been intentionally, the business districts and Black communities have been intentionally many times destroyed, leaving us in a much more vulnerable position.

And so, the average Detroiter in their day to day experience sees for themselves this extractive food economy that they function within. And so, a lot of our messaging

revolves around that. And we find that people can relate to those two things, the health debilitating impacts of the food available in our community and the extractive nature of the economy, which provides food in our community.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Yup. Malik, I want to build on that with another question, though, which is, some people talk about the commercial determinants of health, in addition to the social determinants of health. So, in terms of the, what do you think about the role of the food and beverage industry, for example? Do you see opportunities to engage that industry to promote food justice and food sovereignty?

And to do so in a way that's authentically informed by impacted communities? Or do you not see any opportunities for that, given that they are a huge, huge player, powerful player in this system?

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

I don't think there's any one path for creating the massive transfer of power in changing the social system that we need. Trying to convince the corporate sector to behave in a responsible manner is not the lane that I have chosen to work in, and not the lane that our organization has chosen to work in. But there are some comrades who are choosing to work in that lane. For example, my friend and teacher Will Allen seems to feel that he can have some positive impact on the corporate food sector.

And so, for those who choose to do that, I would encourage you to try to push the envelope as far as you can. For those who decide that they want to work on the policy side, I would encourage you to do that. And for those of us who are working on the grassroots community organizing side, I would encourage you to do that with rigor as well.

So, I don't think there's any one path forward, I think all of those paths are intersecting paths. But I have not seen much history that gives me hope that the corporate sector is going to make much change without tremendous pressure that would affect their bottom line.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

And that was... yeah, go ahead.

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College & Lead Author of the "Beacons of Hope" report

Yeah, I could just add that I think we're always looking for agents of change. And having worked in the intergovernmental sphere for a long time, I think the governments are the slowest change. And sometimes the corporate sector can be quite innovative. I mean, I certainly know some examples from, both from Europe and from Africa, which are really interesting, where they have been willing to really go out and be a front runner in a way.

First of all, I would say a small percentage, but it's very interesting when they succeed in doing that. I guess, I do believe that agents of change will be much faster, the closer you get to the local level, and more to the grassroots community. So, in terms of speed of change, I don't think the corporate sector is going to be charging at great speed, and will need a lot of pressure and government as well. But, yeah, let's try every avenue we can use, I agree.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

So, we just have a couple minutes left. And so, the last question that's come in as a question after my own heart, which is, given the vast variation in food and food system issues around the world, why do you think that there is value in the United States to learning from abroad?

Barbara, you've had a global perspective in your work. And so, if you could reflect on why is Brazil relevant to the U.S. context? And Malik, Malawi is pretty different from Detroit in many ways. And I'm curious, what you saw in that exchange there. So, maybe Barbara first and then we'll go to Malik.

GUEST SPEAKER: Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Associate Faculty, Prescott College

Yeah. I think that they have... and when they say that travel is the most expensive form of introspection, that you, by looking at other instances, you learn so much about yourself. And I think we can do this so much within the U.S. to look at other examples. I mean, Brazil is really a very interesting country for people to look at, because it is both a

developed country and a developing country. And it has a lot of issues around certainly about corporate food, and about mass produced food.

And yet, it also has been able to have these major periods of innovation. They go up and down, and I don't think it's really an up period right now. But they have had these major periods of being able to innovate. And I do think that it's very hard to develop something from scratch, that you can learn a lot from other instances, and use their experiences and then build off of them.

So, I think that openness is as you have at the foundation to learning from experiences internationally is really a great foundation. Thanks.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

So, Malik, before I turn to you, I just have to comment on your, I'm going to use that line that travel is the most expensive form of introspection. And I will know that travel can be figurative and metaphorical and that's what the Blue Marble Quiz is all about. So, but Malik, yeah, tell us about Malawi and Detroit and that connection.

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

So, I want to really broaden it beyond Malawi. So, certainly, there's some lessons from Malawi. But I want to put it within a larger context. And I'll say that one of the problems that tends to happen in the United States is, Americans, as a group tend to have a sense of elitism. And I've seen this in traveling with groups of people from America abroad, where we tend to think that we're the center of the universe.

And so, that attitude is not conducive to learning from other people around the world. So, I just want to point that out that we need to have more humility, and more respect for the history and cultural knowledge of peoples throughout the world. Secondly, the interesting thing about systems of oppression is it's often the people who are in the most oppressed segments of society who have the answers for the largest society.

But because of their cultural knowledge has been suppressed by the evil twin sister of White supremacy, which is Eurocentricity, the system of education, which presumes that White people are the only people in the world that have done anything of any

significance, and that have any ideas about how the world runs and about how we feed ourselves and how we educate our children, so on and so forth.

So, the system of White supremacy and its evil twin sister, Eurocentricity, in a sense, keeps us from knowing these ways of knowing that Indigenous people throughout the world have traditionally known. Now, well, society has advanced its use of technology. The reality is that even modern technology is still dependent upon human interaction, to some extent. And that, it's the values that provide the undergirding for these traditional societies that can be gleaned from even as we're using technology to guide how we use the technology in a way that serves the greater good and not just serves the interest of those who are seeking to make profits at the interest of others.

And so, again, I will go back to this idea that, in order to have a fair just food system, we have to have a fair and just society in a fair just global society as well, that does not elevate the historical and cultural experience that people who are defined as White and diminish and hide the cultural and historical experience of people who are Black, Brown, and are defined in various other ways besides those of European descent.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

Thank you. Thanks so much. I know we extended this 30 minutes, I feel like we could have easily gone on for another hour, at least. Really, really appreciate the discussion today. I want to thank you, Malik and Barbara, and so much for taking the time and sharing your wisdom with us.

GUEST SPEAKER: Malik Yakini, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

Thank you.

MODERATOR: Karabi Acharya, Senior Director, RWJF

I want to thank everyone who joined us and stayed on, we had a great group of people that were able to stay on. Great questions. I wish we could have answered all of them, but we weren't able to. Please take a minute to fill out our very, very short survey. And with that, stay safe, be well. And I hope to see you on our next Reimagined in America webinar. Bye-bye.