

THE ARGUMENT FOR FOOD JUSTICE



I am an environmentalist. It began as early as 7th grade – when I chose “The Harmful Effects of Pollution” as the theme of my English class photography project – and continued when, as a prudent businessman, I understood the need to conserve one’s capital, whether it’s the resources of Cato, Corp. or Earth, Inc.

Many years passed before I learned of a principle of Catholic social teaching, “Care for God’s Creation” and how being stewards of all creation is a responsibility of our faith. Yes, I have always been an environmentalist but the more I understood about caring for God’s creation the more being an environmentalist became inseparably intertwined with my faith and assumed greater meaning to me.

While attending graduate school, I spent Christmas Break at home. I gained 15 pounds in three weeks from a steady diet of eggnog, mom’s Christmas cookies, and rich meals. Three months passed before I lost this weight by subsisting on a diet of granola and milk for breakfast– almost 1000 calories – and a bagel with cream cheese, banana and a diet cola for lunch. The cream cheese alone was 300 calories. Clearly, I was not a nutritionist.

I first heard the phrase “food justice” last year: an equitable approach to a food system that ensures access to fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally-appropriate food that is fairly distributed, that is inclusive, community-led and participatory, with consideration for the well-being of the land, workers and all creation. You won’t find “food justice” in the 1769 pages of the 2008 Farm Bill. You will find an occasional reference to fruit and vegetables, but not many. You will find the term, “specialty crops,” which is defined (by referring to another bill) as “fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and nursery crops.”

When did fruits and vegetables, staples of our diets, become, not food, but specialty crops? Treated even more rarely than fruits and vegetables are organic crops.

Agricultural subsidies are the second largest component of the Farm Bill after food stamps. The most common subsidies are for the big five commodity crops: corn, wheat, rice, cotton and soybeans. According to the U.S. Bishops, “The current structure, however, excludes or leaves behind many small farmers and ranchers who must compete with larger producers and wealthier farmers.”¹

The current structure of agricultural subsidies favors commodities and excludes fruits, vegetables and organic crops and the farmers who grow them. Nutritious food that, if it’s organic, exemplifies good stewardship of our land and bodies. While individual rights give people the freedom to choose what they consume, ensuring real choices influenced, not by agribusinesses but by a free market, is prudent policy.

“The 2013 reauthorization of the Farm Bill provides an opportunity to improve on our nation’s agricultural policies and build a more just framework that better serves small and moderate-size family farms in the U.S., promotes good stewardship of the land, overcomes hunger here and abroad[.]”¹

Relying on high-calorie, low-cost food is the leading cause of obesity, a major stress on our healthcare system, and severely detrimental to the futures of the unborn and preschool children. Yes, I am an environmentalist and I understand the relationship between being stewards of God’s creation and supporting production of and access to fresh, nutritious food. I am a nutritionist.

Pope Paul VI wrote that if you want peace, work for justice. To paraphrase Pope Paul, if you want affordable and nutritious food, work for food justice. [Tell your representatives](#) to support a farm bill that serves our local farmers who grow food and programs that ensure the poor can access nutritious food.

[How to donate healthy food to your food pantry](#)



Office of Life, Justice, and Peace