

# Food Dignity:

## Action research on engaging food insecure communities and universities in building sustainable community food systems

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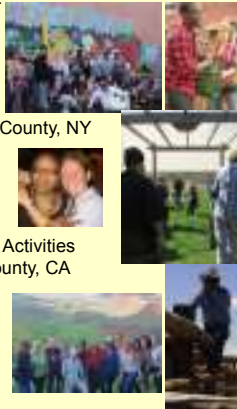
### Introduction to Food Dignity

"The people hold thousands of solutions in their hands," notes the Via Campesina declaration on December 9th, 2010. Core research questions in Food Dignity (FD) include: who are the people, what are these solutions, how can we best enable citizens to implement them, and how does the implementation impact community food systems?

Our five-year partnership began in April 2011.

Our partners are:

- **East New York Farms!** (ENYF!)  
United Community Centers, Brooklyn, NY
- **Whole Community Project** (WCP)  
Cornell Cooperative Extension, Tompkins County, NY
- **Feeding Laramie Valley** (FLV)  
Laramie, Albany County, WY
- **Blue Mountain Associates** (BMA)  
Wind River Reservation, WY
- **Dig Deep Farms** (DDF), Deputy Sheriff's Activities League, Cherryland/Ashland, Alameda County, CA
- **Action Resources International**
- **University of Wyoming** (UW), Laramie
- **Cornell University** (CU), Ithaca, NY
- **Ithaca College**, Ithaca, NY
- **University of California, Davis**

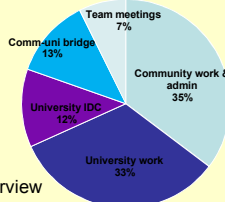


Our core action, research and education methods are:

- Five \$350,000 "community organizing support packages" including staff, travel, leadership development and minigrants.
- Five case stories/studies of community food system projects.
- One case story/study of the project itself.
- Pathway models.
- Minigrant tracking and evaluation.
- Garden harvest measures.
- New minors at CU and UW.
- Case-based, multi-media public education materials.
- Networking and net building.
- Working for a radically axiological, community-led, post disciplinary action research paradigm.

Food Dignity budget arenas	amounts
Community work & admin (incl. 10% IDC that USDA disallowed)	\$1,758,000
University work	\$1,643,000
University indirect (IDC)	\$603,000
Comm-uni liaising	\$615,000
Seven team meetings	\$364,000

Our \$4.98m Food Dignity budget overview



### EFSNE meeting agenda notes from FD

We have provided examples here from our FD learning that might relate directly to our conference agenda circulated by EFSNE. We would be delighted to discuss our evidence and examples.

*On "transdisciplinary learning: processes and lessons"*

- Distances between disciplines within academia are tiny and easily traversable in comparison to those between front-line community work and universities.
- The most important, and lowest hanging, fruit in food system research is growing there – not crossing walls within 'ivory towers,' but outside the towers.
- Using a post-disciplinary lens that community leaders in food system change offer us best brings that potential harvest into focus, including helping identify what disciplinary tools are most relevant to use when and where.

*On "students: who, how and why"*

- We all have much to learn and something to teach.
- Kurt Lewin suggests the best learning strategy is cycles of action and reflection. Yet universities mainly reflect while and community organizations mainly act.
- Community-university action research partnerships help resolve that and create appropriate engaged-learning opportunities for academic students.
- Our academic graduate students have been adept at working in the orchards between community and academy; professors can be their biggest obstacle.
- Humility and accountability training for academic students and their faculty supervisors should be required before engaged learning partnerships begin.
- Teaching academic students is the university's job; when community organizations are asked to teach and mentor they should be compensated accordingly.

*On "production, distribution, consumption, and education"*

- Labor issues are often marginalized by academic food system frames and, largely, are not a core action arena with our community food system partners.
- The distance between these in food gardening is nearly zero and is otherwise minimized in most FD community partner action, e.g., markets and workshops.

*On "networking food systems professionals"*

- If we professionalize front-line food systems work, it will stop being change work.
- In five years, the US has leapt from too few academic food systems and equity meetings to too many to be useful without a community-university organizing coalition.
- Spending face-to-face time together has been the most important FD investment in our team collaboration.

*On "public policy implications"*

- Treat food gardening as a cornerstone agriculture and public health strategy; including enabling a garden in every yard, community garden in every neighborhood.
- Invest in individual citizen solutions (e.g., via minigrants).
- Fund networking, mentorship and citizen leadership development (time and travel).
- Support community-based food system organization work as part of an integrated local government and federal social services strategy for community development and sustainability (e.g., with block grants).
- Value (including measuring) civic infrastructure and network building as an outcome.
- Deregulate micro-scale production and distribution.
- Provide more systems and skills education, less individual health education (e.g., more about prevalence and impacts of food insecurity and of food waste; less talking about nutritional content of rubber models of vegetables).

*On "future of food systems research" & "evaluating complex, integrated projects"*

- Practitioner partners must be as involved as academics in setting research agendas and conducting applied research, and be funded equitably (including indirect costs).
- Dominant academic research models (e.g., single and academic PI, controlled trials, exclusion of outcomes that practitioners value) will offer little to systems change.
- Our more unusual useful approaches have included: Pathway Models, personal stories, budget mapping, community-uni liaising, and frequent face-to-face meetings.

### FD values statement

We value the fundamental dignity, worth, sovereignty, self-determination and the inherent power of all people. As members of the Food Dignity project, we are committed to principles and ways of working within our own work and in the changes we wish to inform and inspire in the world, by:

- combating all forms of racism, oppression and implicit bias;
  - respecting and valuing the individual and shared journeys of the people, the project and the histories of our communities, including historical trauma;
  - valuing authentic first-person voice and first-person knowledge;
  - valuing the different ways that people live, work and relate to each other;
  - valuing the act of listening and specifically listening long enough to achieve shared meaning;
  - valuing seeing and being seen, listening and being heard, becoming real to each other, recognizing that an important kind of knowing is experiential and lived;
  - valuing accountability to one another and to the work for both the intention and impact of our words and actions;
  - and persevering through the challenges that come with our inclusion and engagement of differences;
- as we strive to achieve equity for every human being and personal, institutional, structural and systemic transformations.

(Developed and approved in May 2014)